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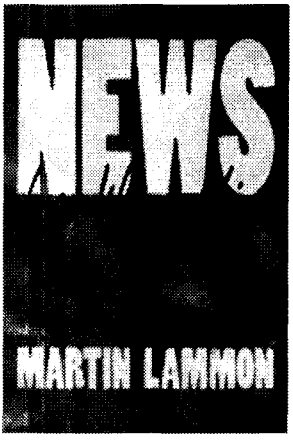

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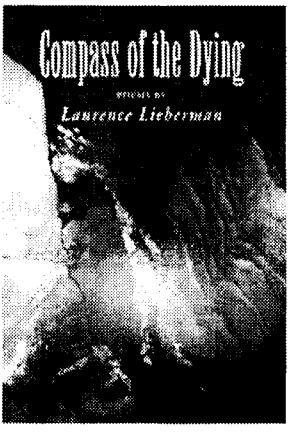

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The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

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TO OUR READERS

Two new books, one edited by an Advisory Editor, and one by a Contributing Editor respectively of THE HUDSON REVIEW, have recently been published. In accordance with our policy, they will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed below for the interest of our readers:

DANA GIOIA, co-ed.: *Certain Solitudes: On the Poetry of Donald Justice.* The University of Arkansas Press. $28.00.

JOHN LOUGHERY: *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth Century History.* Henry Holt and Company. $35.00.

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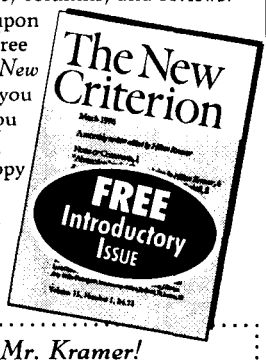

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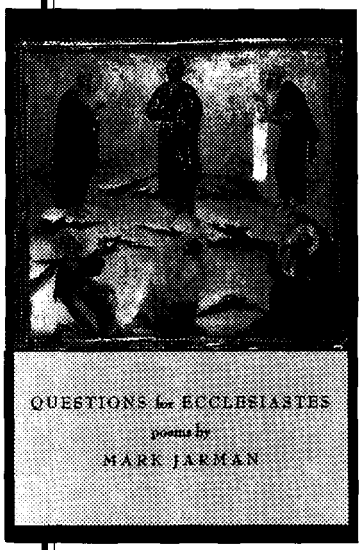

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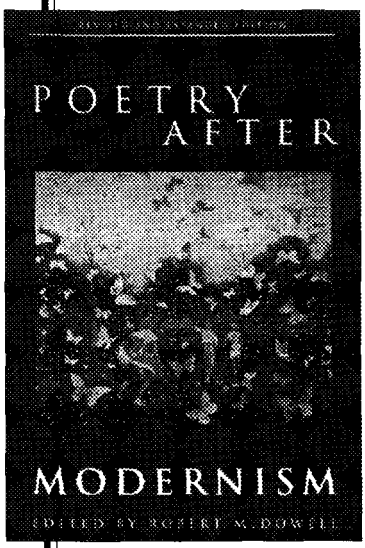

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MICHAEL PEICH

The Hudson Review's Early Years: An Interview with Frederick Morgan

MP: You entered Princeton in the fall of 1939 and almost immediately began studying with Allen Tate in the Creative Writing Program. This was coincidentally the first year of the Princeton program, which was itself one of the first creative writing programs anywhere in the country. (And think of how many there are now!) Did Tate encourage you and Joseph Bennett, a fellow freshman whom you met in the program at the same time, to start *The Hudson Review*?

FM: The key experience for Bennett and me at Princeton was that of editing the *Nassau Literary Magazine*. We had both been involved with literary publications even earlier at our respective preparatory schools. When we arrived at Princeton, we applied for work at the *Nassau Lit*, as it was called (this was the undergraduate literary magazine), were accepted by the outgoing Editors, became members of the Editorial Board ourselves, and by 1942 found ourselves running the show. By coincidence 1942 was the *Lit*'s Centennial year; so we brought out a special large issue and had a lot of fun promoting it and rounding up subscriptions. We were interested in everything to do with putting out a literary magazine. Even had Allen Tate not been there at Princeton, Bennett and I would still have tried out for the *Lit* and had fun running it.

But Tate did from the start encourage us both to pursue literary careers, and eventually suggested that we start a magazine of our own after the War. This idea was already in our heads, but of course World War II was an ever-present, ever-threatening fact when Joe and I were undergraduates, and neither of us felt confident of surviving it.

MP: Did you begin your affiliation with the *Nassau Lit* in your freshman year?

FM: Yes.

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MP: And then you became Editor, Co-editor actually?

FM: In my junior year, 1941-42. The tradition was that juniors took these prominent roles in extracurricular activities because seniors were supposed to be writing their senior theses.

MP: Was Bennett the other Co-editor?

FM: He was Managing Editor, but I worked more with him than with the other Co-editor, who was primarily interested in political and social matters rather than literary ones.

MP: When you became Co-editor, what were your plans for the *Nassau Lit*? Did you plan anything to mark the Centennial year?

FM: After I became Co-editor, I had the idea of trying to increase the circulation of the *Lit* by getting contributions from distinguished writers, and I accordingly wrote to a number of them. Some of them sent us things and some of them didn't. The ones who did included Thomas Mann and John Dos Passos. The ones who didn't included Ernest Hemingway who, however, wrote me a very gracious, cheerful note from Cuba. I can't recall whether we wrote to Faulkner or not. If so, we didn't get him.

MP: But you concentrated on fiction at the expense of poetry and criticism?

FM: We wanted writers whose names would be widely recognized by undergraduates, alumni, and members of the Princeton community. We were after subscriptions. The names of poets and critics would not have been as well known.

MP: Did your experience with the *Lit* confirm your feelings about editing a magazine in the future? For example, that this would be work you would enjoy?

FM: Yes. I enjoyed all the aspects. I even enjoyed hustling for subscriptions. At one point, I had the idea of inviting some of the dancers down from Roseland, the big Broadway dance hall, to cruise the campus with us and buttonhole guys and talk them into subscribing. These young women carried out the project with enthusiasm. They were very persuasive, and we sold a lot of subscriptions that way until one of the deans caught on and told us to desist. Outside people were not supposed to solicit on campus.

MP: Were you and Bennett in the "accelerated" program—the one developed to enable undergraduates to finish and get their degrees before being called into the Armed Services?

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FM: Yes. That didn't take hold, of course, until after Pearl Harbor.

MP: What happened after you and Bennett were graduated from Princeton?

FM: I had enlisted in the Army and was called to active duty in January 1943, almost immediately after my early graduation. Bennett was summoned into the Navy a little later. We didn't see each other again until the spring of 1946, after the War was over and Joe had moved permanently from Pittsburgh to New York City.

MP: While you were serving during the War, did you stay in touch with Tate? Did he continue to encourage you?

FM: I exchanged occasional letters with him. I was stationed at Camp Hood, Texas, now Fort Hood. I had what turned out to be a more or less permanent address although I never knew it was going to be so. I kept expecting to be shipped out. Bennett, on the other hand, was traveling around the Pacific on a destroyer. Tate had become Editor of *The Sewanee Review* and I did indeed correspond a bit with him, and he was always friendly and encouraging. But I can't say that during the War I felt any increased momentum towards starting a magazine. Army conditions were such that one was living day to day.

MP: You were discharged in November of 1945?

FM: Correct.

MP: Bennett was discharged some four or five months later?

FM: Yes.

MP: What was the crystallizing event that caused the two of you to decide, at that point, to start *The Hudson Review*? It was something you had discussed as undergraduates, of course.

FM: We had both kept the idea alive in our minds through the War, and once we had been discharged from military service and gone through the inevitable postwar readjustments, the idea surfaced again and we were able to go ahead and bring it into reality. The determining event was Bennett's move from Pittsburgh to New York in 1946. This made it possible for the two of us to discuss all the implications and to work together very closely in making our plans.

MP: What were your goals, your expectations for the magazine?

FM: We wanted to publish work by well-known writers whom we admired, whose works we had read with pleasure and enthusiasm,

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and who were not, many of them, well recognized by the commercial publishing establishment. We also wanted to publish new work by new writers, because we felt that it would be exciting in itself, and also a real service. This is just as much our goal today as it was fifty years ago.

MP: What helped you define these two goals, in terms of starting a new magazine?

FM: What would the alternative have been, assuming we were seriously interested in advancing the cause of good writing? I guess it would have been to try to get jobs with one of the large-circulation magazines or major publishing houses, and then work from within the establishment. But that option didn't appeal to us.

MP: That leads directly into my next question. Did you have a clear vision of *The Hudson Review* as something different from commercial publishing?

FM: Definitely! In those days there was quite obviously a real division between the commercial side of publishing and its literary or aesthetic side. (That division of course still exists.) A few very talented or lucky writers were able to straddle the gap. A handful of excellent writers were also very good sellers—for example, Thomas Mann, Faulkner, Hemingway, Frost. But there were many other highly accomplished writers who had not received due recognition.

MP: From the beginning, did you plan to give equal representation to fiction, poetry and criticism, or did you favor one of the three?

FM: Right from the start we saw the magazine not only as being dedicated to discovering new writing, but also to serving as a full-scale literary review. This second ambition involved giving our readers a view of what was going on in the literary world and to some extent in the other arts as well. So we wanted from the very beginning to have a strong critical component, in the sense that we'd be reviewing important new books and covering developments not only in literature, but in music, theatre, dance and the visual arts. We had a double mission. We have never seen ourselves as a magazine that contents itself with publishing its favorite poetry and/or fiction without making any effort to take account of what is going on in the rest of the literary world.

MP: Following up on that, were there other literary magazines

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that helped shape the format of *The Hudson Review*? Were there influences, in other words?

FM: We were certainly influenced to some degree by the better literary magazines then in existence. We wanted, for one thing, to be at least as good as they were. At the time we began publishing the three top literary magazines were *The Sewanee Review*, *The Kenyon Review* and *Partisan Review*. We read them, and were very much aware of what they were doing.

MP: Why did you call the magazine *The Hudson Review*?

FM: We had an attorney, obtained through a friend, who was working for us without compensation. He explained that he would do what was necessary to get us started, but that he didn't want to be put to any extra trouble. One day he telephoned and said that he had to go down to Washington the following week. While he was there, he would stop in at the Patent Office and register the name of the magazine. He asked us to give him a list of possible names and said he would bypass any that might be contestable and use the first one which he knew was free and clear. This turned out to be *The Hudson Review*. Bennett and I had gotten together to work up the list. We were over on the West Side, and I looked out the window and thought of the Hudson River down there at the end of the street. What about *The Hudson Review*, I thought. I suggested it, Joe approved it, and we put it down on the list. It was our second or third choice, as I recall. And it has worn very well as a title—better than I might have expected.

MP: In what sense?

FM: It didn't build up too many preconceptions, and was noncommittal as to what the thrust of the magazine would be. This made it easier for the magazine to define itself gradually in terms of its own performance. The name suited the whole tendency of the magazine which has been over the years definitely pragmatic and non-ideological. I have never been an ideological person and never wanted the magazine to be ideological.

MP: How about the third founding editor, William Arrowsmith, who was Class of 1945 at Princeton—two classes behind you and Bennett? How and when did he become involved with *The Hudson Review*?

FM: After the War, while we were in the process of organizing the magazine, Bennett suggested we ask him to come in with us. I thought it was a good suggestion. I knew that Arrowsmith was

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smart, and that he had a lot of energy and good ideas. And he indeed made a valuable contribution to the magazine in its earliest years. But during the 1950s his interest and participation rapidly faded, and by 1956 or so he had pretty much dropped out of the picture, though we kept him on the masthead a while longer as a courtesy. Part of his problem was that he traveled a great deal and never lived in New York; he was always on the fringes, away from the action.

MP: Was Arrowsmith's contribution to *The Hudson Review* comparable to the one made by Bennett?

FM: No. Without Bennett I would never have started *The Hudson Review*, and there would have been no *Hudson Review*. Whereas if Arrowsmith had decided against joining us, Bennett and I would have gone right ahead with our plans for starting up the magazine. We were all set to do so.

MP: What was each person's editorial responsibility in those days—yours, Bennett's, and Arrowsmith's?

FM: From almost the very beginning *The Hudson Review* has had its own office here in Manhattan. I went to that office every working day. We also had an office staff. In the early years this consisted, with rare exceptions, of a single person, invariably a woman. We didn't interview our first male job applicant until the 1970s. She and I would take care of the day's business together. This included everything: correspondence with authors, business correspondence, the various stages of work with our printer, and so on.

Bennett had another full-time job and never came to *The Hudson Review* office. But he and I lived within a block of one another, and it was very easy for us to meet in the evenings or on weekends, and to deliver messages and manuscripts back and forth. It was during these meetings that we discussed manuscripts and reached editorial and business decisions. Joe held up his end of things not only by reading quantities of manuscripts, but by taking on almost all the magazine's accounting and financial work. He was treasurer of *The Hudson Review* for a good many years.

Arrowsmith, as I have already noted, was only an occasional visitor to New York and not deeply involved. We sent him manuscripts from time to time and his comments were often very

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perceptive and helpful. His position, in fact, was rather that of an "advisory" than a full working editor.

MP: In the early issues of *The Hudson Review*, you published work by very well-known modernist writers. How did you get work from people like Wallace Stevens, Thomas Mann, T.S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas?

FM: In various ways. Bennett and I had met Stevens while we were undergraduates, when he had come to Princeton at Tate's invitation to give a reading to members of the Creative Writing department. Then after the War, when we were getting *The Hudson Review* started, he was one of a small number of writers whom Bennett and I particularly wanted to publish and to whom we sent letters. I don't recall whether it was Joe or I who wrote to Stevens first: we took turns corresponding with him. In addition, I met him several times in the late forties and early fifties at parties given in New York by Henry and Barbara Church. Church, as you know, was a close friend of Stevens.

Eliot was also on our "preferred" list. Bennett and I both wrote to him, and I eventually met him in '48 or '49 when he gave a reading here in New York. The meeting with Dylan Thomas came about a little later thanks to Bennett's friend Oscar Williams, the anthologist, who was very close to Thomas.

The Thomas Mann connection goes back to Princeton. I had asked him for something for the *Nassau Lit*, and he had sent us a little piece. I think he had a soft spot for Princeton, because he lived there briefly when he first came to this country . When I got back in touch with him five years later and asked him for something for *The Hudson Review*, he came through in a big way by letting me take any chapter I wanted from his novel, *Dr. Faustus*, before its publication in English. My special relationship with Mann continued, incidentally: we later published a section of his *Felix Krull.*

MP: Do you recall the other writers on that preferred list?

FM: Besides Eliot and Stevens, there were John Crowe Ransom, e.e. cummings, Theodore Roethke, Hemingway, Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Saul Bellow, Kenneth Burke, Yvor Winters, I.A. Richards, William Empson—and doubtless others whose names I don't at the moment remember.

MP: A pretty impressive list. Did Allen Tate, in those early years,

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help you secure some of these writers? You mentioned that he had originally made it possible for you to meet Stevens.

FM: Tate was certainly helpful in allowing us to use his name in some of the letters we first sent out, and I'm sure he said a friendly word here and there.

MP: Did he influence your thinking in terms of identifying these writers?

FM: Yes, in many cases, because he was the person who had steered us into modernist writing in the first place. It was thanks to him that we had first read Eliot, Stevens, the New Critics, and others. On the other hand, I had read Thomas Mann on my own. Tate had nothing to do with my getting in touch with him.

MP: This leads into my next question, which is: many of the essays published in the early years of the magazine were written by New Critics like Richards, Winters, Mark Schorer and R.P. Blackmur. Did *The Hudson Review* in those first years, 1948 to 1952 or '53, take a conscious "New Critical" stance? Were you particularly attracted to the New Criticism?

FM: We have always been mistrustful of taking critical stances. We have published what we have liked, without feeling that we have to explain our choices in terms of some particular program or platform. If a piece of critical writing strikes us as saying something new and intelligent, and if it's clearly and forcefully expressed, we'll accept it without worrying about whether or not it conforms to this or that critical doctrine. It's undoubtedly true that in the early years of the magazine, Bennett and I were highly receptive to the New Criticism. It was the critical method which we had been taught and with which we were familiar. But we weren't consciously trying to promote it. And we were open to other kinds of writing as well, and became more open to them as time went on.

MP: As we have noted, Allen Tate encouraged the magazine in its earliest days and exercised a certain amount of influence. Now, in the early fifties you began publishing Ezra Pound, who is famous for having encouraged many small publishers during the first half of the century. How did you meet Pound? And did he have an influence on the editorial direction of *The Hudson Review*?

FM: I met Pound by going down to Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, where he was confined in a ward for the criminally

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insane, and calling on him—having first obtained permission from him and from Dr. Winfred Overholser, the Superintendent. I had heard through the literary grapevine that this was the procedure. If you wanted to pay Pound a visit, you wrote both to him and to Dr. Overholser, and if Pound wanted to see you he would tell the doctor, and the doctor would give you permission. Pound's *Pisan Cantos* had been published in 1949 and awarded the Bollingen Prize, and this event had created a storm of controversy. I became extremely interested and began to read, or reread, everything by Pound I could get my hands on. This came to include all the poetry and almost all the literary criticism, but not a great deal of the less available (at that time) political and economic writing—much of which is harebrained and some of which, as I discovered later, is distinctly unpleasant. In any case, I got my appointment, went down to Washington in January 1950, and met Pound at the hospital. At that first meeting he presented me with the complete manuscript of his translation of the Confucian *Analects*, and also with the very disorderly manuscript of a memoir entitled *Indians in Overalls* by his pen pal, the anthropologist Jaime De Angulo. We published both the *Analects* and *Indians in Overalls* within the year. I worked for hours over *Indians in Overalls*, as the manuscript was chaotic and heavy editing was required, but the results made the effort well worthwhile. These two pieces, both of which attracted lots of attention, were certainly not "New Criticism" nor anything that the New Critics would have been directly concerned with, and this indicates that as early as in our third year of publication we were already branching away from New Critical preoccupations.

Did Pound influence our editorial direction? It's fair to say that he opened my eyes to additional possibilities. For example, to the possibilities of publishing translations from foreign literatures. Pound, as everyone knows, was very strongly focussed on the Mediterranean tradition. And despite his ignorance of, and lack of appreciation for, other traditions, that particular strength of his happened to mean a lot to me at that moment. On the other hand, I disregarded almost all the specific advice he favored me with over the next several years. Unlike Allen Tate, Ezra Pound was a hectoring kind of would-be mentor. He wanted to tell me exactly what to do issue by issue. For quite a while after that first meeting he wrote me two or three letters a week, giving me

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instructions: do this, don't do that. Some writers whom we thought were important, he didn't like at all—Thomas Mann, for example. At the same time he'd be promoting some crackpot monetary theorist. Frankly, I let it all go in one ear and out the other, and kept on doing what I wanted. Pound's letters ultimately became a bore, but I enjoyed my visits to Saint Elizabeth's—that is, at first—because I liked the man personally and found him fascinating. I also liked Mrs. Pound, who was almost always present, and found the whole experience unusual and rather fun.

MP: Did you visit him often?

FM: As I recall, I visited him five or six times over the following six or seven years. The final visit was unpleasant. He had with him, for the first time in my presence, a small group of little-known, sleazy, fascist-minded admirers—including a man named John Casper, who was later arrested and imprisoned for anti-black rabble rousing. These people were serving up various anti-Semitic and anti-black innuendoes and Pound was snapping at the bait. I was disgusted and paid no further visits. In fact, I only saw Pound once again, years later, when he was a free man once more, but much older, and greatly humbled and chastened.

MP: But would you still allow that he had helped you expand your horizons?

FM: Certainly. Over the years a good many men and women have helped *The Hudson Review* expand its horizons. Ezra Pound must be considered prominent among them.

MP: By 1960 Arrowsmith was no longer with the magazine, and then Bennett retired in 1966. You had been working right along in New York with, for the most part, a single assistant, the Managing Editor. How did the departures of Bennett and Arrowsmith affect the magazine?

FM: Arrowsmith's departure affected the magazine minimally because he had not been an active force since the early fifties. Bennett's departure, however, even though he gave me ample notice, created a crisis for me. We were both in our mid-forties; his plan, which he carried through, was to leave the country and spend the rest of his life abroad, writing and traveling. I told him I would keep him on the masthead indefinitely, but at the same time began wondering whether I myself really wanted to go on with the magazine—whether this might not be a good time to put

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an end to *The Hudson Review,* so as to be able to spend the rest of my life doing other things. The question wasn't whether I'd be able to carry on without Bennett: valuable though he was to *The Hudson Review,* I knew I could do that. It was rather whether I wanted to.

I discussed the problem with a few writers whom I knew, and with friends: they all said, "You've got to go on." They certainly influenced me. But I think that even without their advice, I would in the end have decided to continue. I enjoyed the work—and having by that time edited the magazine for close to twenty years, was already deeply committed. *The Hudson Review* was a going concern, and I began to realize that it was still in mid-progress and had more distance to travel.

I liked the work. I had the writers. I had the organization, the connections. Furthermore, the magazine was at last beginning to establish itself in the general consciousness as an independent literary review, rather than as just another journal of the New Criticism. That misconception was widespread for over a decade. Ignorant critics and journalists writing for mass market publications—the kind who don't bother to read for themselves but are content to parrot out the clichés they pick up from one another—kept on referring to *The Hudson Review* as a mouthpiece of the New Criticism for years after it had ceased being anything that could remotely justify such a label. Now at last it was beginning to be recognized as a strong and independent force. In the end, then, after weighing all the considerations very carefully, I decided that *The Hudson Review* should continue.

MP: At that point, did you make any changes in the organization of the magazine?

FM: Yes. To help fill the gap created by Bennett's departure, I invited three writers whose work I admired and had published, and whom I liked personally, to join the magazine. They were Robert Martin Adams, Marius Bewley and Anthony Hecht. Their names first appeared on the masthead of our Spring 1966 issue. They were the first in that distinguished series of Advisory Editors who have been so extremely helpful to us over the past thirty years.

The second step, which proved to be even more important, was the hiring of Paula Deitz as Associate Editor in the autumn of 1967. Her name first appeared on our Winter 1967-68 masthead,

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and she has been with the magazine ever since. *The Hudson Review*'s business operations were expanding somewhat at that time, and I became aware, too, of an increase in promotional opportunities. It seemed a good time to take on an extra person—all the more so in view of Bennett's departure. At first Paula Deitz was mostly occupied with business matters: financial work of which Bennett had formerly been in charge, promotion, publicity, permissions. But she very soon demonstrated that she had an extraordinary gift for coming up with good ideas—ideas that were at once practical, exciting, and potentially very fruitful. For example, it was she who made the point early on that the magazine should take note of its Twentieth Anniversary year (1968), by bringing out a special issue, throwing a big party, etc. (Because I had lacked sufficient office staff I had let the Tenth go by unnoticed.) We went ahead with that Twentieth Anniversary Issue, and Paula herself made virtually all the arrangements for the special events—a very large job, with a highly successful outcome. Since then, we have published anniversary issues every five years, and have been regularly involved in sponsoring panel discussions, readings and similar events.

After three or four years of concentration on the business side of *The Hudson Review*, Paula Deitz began to help with the editing as well. Her opinions on manuscripts submitted to us were right on target, and in cases where they had to be cut and reshaped, she proved herself to be a very patient and capable working editor. She became Co-editor effective with our Summer 1975 issue, by which time she and I were teaming up together in shaping each issue as it came out, and in planning the ones to come. Her contribution to the magazine has been enormous: within three or four years of her first joining us it had exceeded Arrowsmith's, and by now it has substantially exceeded Bennett's as well.

MP: Do you think it appropriate that we mention the fact of your marriage to Paula Deitz?

FM: Only to the extent that it may indicate how closely we have been able to work together on the magazine. We were married in November 1969.

MP: These changes you made upon Bennett's retirement—how did they affect the magazine?

FM: Very favorably, in several ways. Thanks to Paula Deitz we were able to get a better grip on our business and promotional

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operations. We mounted advertising campaigns and subscription drives, and were able to take greater advantage of the opportunities that sometimes arose for obtaining special publicity. Then, too, permissions were becoming a major factor. As *The Hudson Review* became better known, we were getting more and more reprint requests. Paula took care of all this, and set up a procedure which we still use.

In addition, the increased influx of manuscripts had become a problem even before Bennett's retirement: we were by now receiving a great many more, week by week, than during the early years. Here again Paula Deitz was a big help to us, and so were the Advisory Editors. They were of great practical assistance—but more than that, by contributing to the magazine, each in his or her own measure, their experience, their expertise, their individual points of view, they enriched *The Hudson Review* and helped it broaden its outlook. I am extremely grateful to the ten Advisory Editors whose names are now listed on our masthead, some of whom have been with us for many years, and to all their predecessors—with special mention of the two good friends who died "in office": Marius Bewley and Sonya Rudikoff.

To sum up—I believe that the changes which I initiated in 1966 and '67 resulted in a more efficient and effective magazine, with broader horizons and greater visibility. And it consequently became more widely known and appreciated. The way things have turned out, I'm very glad I didn't terminate *The Hudson Review* thirty years ago.

The preceding interview took place on August 8, 1997 at Frederick Morgan's Upper East Side apartment in New York City. I am grateful to Mr. Morgan for his candor and willingness to help preserve the history of his life's work. This interview will be continued in a future issue. M.P.

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MILLICENT BELL

Hamlet, Revenge!

When, at the end of the second act, Hamlet bawls, "Bloody, bawdy villain! / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless Villain! / Oh vengeance!", the audience laughed, I guess, the way modern audiences laugh when viewing Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein.* They recognized a horror-thriller style old-fashioned enough to be funny; this was the way the Revenger hero of Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* had ranted on the stage fifteen years before. Shakespeare's modern editors disagree about the "Oh vengeance," which appears only in the 1623 Folio version of the play. The editor of the Arden edition, who commits himself to an earlier Quarto text, where it is missing, thinks it must have been put in later by someone else, probably an actor. It jars, he feels, with the brooding self-reproach Hamlet has just expressed after hearing the player orate about the avenging of Achilles by his son Pyrrhus and about the grief of Hecuba over slaughtered Priam. The editor of the New Cambridge *Hamlet* thinks Shakespeare wrote it himself: "This cry, the great climax of the rant with which Hamlet emulates the Player, exhausts his futile self-recrimination, and turns, in proper disgust, from a display of verbal histrionics to more practical things." I, too, think it was Shakespeare's, but I disagree about its tone and intent. It is really a nudge to the funny bone of the sophisticated theatergoer of 1602. It resulted from the irrepressible leaking out of the playwright's satiric impulse in the midst of high seriousness.

If so, it is a small sign of what happens elsewhere. The elocutionary set piece that has moved Hamlet is itself an imitation of the style of a creaky older play about Queen Dido of Carthage. Hamlet is not put off by its stiff rhetoric; the mercilessness of the blood-smeared Pyrrhus and Hecuba's lamentation stir him profoundly by their application to his case. But the theater buffs in the audience must have been amused. Perhaps also by "The Murder of Gonzago," which the company of strolling players puts

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on according to Hamlet's instruction. This is to be another "Revenge Tragedy"—as the type is called—one, like Kyd's, with a Spanish setting, but it will represent his own father's murder and so cause his uncle to acknowledge his crime. Its parodic character is indicated by Hamlet's impatient exclamation to the actor who comes on as the murderer: "leave thy damnable faces and begin. Come, the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge."

"The Murder of Gonzago" is, I would say, a fictitious play invented by Shakespeare as an example of the kind of play he makes fun of at various points in *Hamlet.* Though Hamlet is supposed to have added some lines there is no evidence of the voice we know him by in the fragment we hear before a terrified Claudius rises from his seat. It is stale bombast cast into out-of-style couplets, unlike the naturalistic dialogue enclosing it. Shakespeare seems to have wanted to exaggerate its theatricality. He sets it in contrast with the reality of a modern—though medieval—Denmark. At the same time, Shakespeare is letting the audience know it is going to see the unfolding in *his* play, despite its realism, of just another such tale of teeth-grinding and bloody setting-to-rights as those it used to find so thrilling. The *Hamlet* world is a contemporary realm, and the thought behind it, as I shall be suggesting, belongs to that latest Renaissance moment which Shakespeare shares with Montaigne. Yet it deliberately frames its modernity within an archaic kind of story (ultimately finding its model in Seneca), that of its probable source, a lost Revenge Tragedy, also by Kyd. This "ur-Hamlet," as the scholars call it, was undoubtedly the play remembered by a contemporary as including a "ghost which cried so miserably at the Theatre, like an oyster-wife, *Hamlet revenge.*" Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has all the prescribed features of the once popular genre (and its surprising retro success helped bring the genre back into popularity). It has a ghost who demands revenge for a murder and a hero who promises to achieve it, pretends to be mad, indulges in philosophic soliloquies, and does not succeed in his purpose till the end of five acts. Even the play-within-a-play is a favorite of older plays of this kind. Like *The Spanish Tragedy,* which has all the features just mentioned, *Hamlet* also has a secondary revenge plot which brings about the completion of the main plot; it is Laertes' drive to avenge the death of *his* father, Polonius, which takes the action to its finish. The audience would recognize these reprises

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and wait for the turn Shakespeare would put on them. What he did was employ them all with a difference—make a teasing mystery of the delay of the execution of revenge which once had served just to extend suspense, make his hero's detached soliloquies exceed in profundity and poetry anything the theater had ever heard, make the madness the Revenger is supposed to feign to conceal his purposes an occasion for paradoxical wit and cynical philosophy as well as a symptom of the hero's mental anguish, introduce in Laertes the model of the effective Revenger yet use Hamlet's relation to the Polonius family as an opportunity to contrast him with "normal," or ordinary, persons. But, as though reminding the audience of his effort to reincarnate the old Revenger persona, Hamlet will still shout at the end, when Laertes threatens to outdo him in melodramatic grief for Ophelia, "I'll rant as well as thou!"

Hamlet's postmodern status as "metatheater"—theater about theater—is obvious enough. We might suspect a personal self-reflexiveness in it. Was not Shakespeare himself an actor? Shakespeare was a theater man, fascinated by the problems of his craft—and his Hamlet not only knows the history of Elizabethan drama but gives judicious advice to actors and can act creditably himself, can write a dramatic script or part of one, and he loves to see a play put on, quite aside from its possible use as a conscience-catcher. As a result, there are, from the earliest moment to the last, occasions when the curtain between the theatrical and the supposedly real is rent—beginning with Hamlet's remark when the ghost can be heard groaning as it retreats to its purgatorial exile: "You hear this fellow in the cellarage"—"cellarage" being a term that reminds the audience that an actor is making noises down in the space beneath the stage.

"Metatheatricality," as it may be too modish to call it, is detectable elsewhere in the literature of the Elizabethan stage, and Shakespeare's earlier plays give an emphasis to common terms that suggest the theater, words like tragedy, play, perform, show, act, scene or part, are frequent. *Hamlet* is particularly rich in such language. What has not been noted is that Hamlet's theater interest—and all the hints and references to the theatrical in the play—constitute a metaphoric motif and the tracking sign of a dominating theme. *Hamlet* abounds in situations in which the actors are audiences. When Hamlet observes Claudius at prayer,

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he is the unseen watcher who does not detect the deception in the performance; the King's repentance is momentary only and will not gain him salvation. Hamlet himself is watched by Polonius from behind an arras both in the "nunnery" scene with Ophelia and the parallel scene with his mother in her closet. With Ophelia, Hamlet is, perhaps, consciously "playing a scene" for her benefit but unaware of hidden witnesses. Most productions of the play want to make it somehow possible for Hamlet to demonstrate that he knows about Polonius' proximity—and improvise a rustle behind the arras at which Hamlet starts before he asks Ophelia where her father is. But the theatricality of the situation lies precisely in Hamlet's oblivion—as an actor must be oblivious of the audience in the darkened theater. Meanwhile, the "nunnery" scene itself is more than an occasion for the abuse of poor Ophelia; it is a commentary on the unreliability of appearances, for Hamlet will tell her not to trust the seeming in men, not even his own pose as a lover ("We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us"). He abuses her as though she were herself a deceiving person—or an actress ("God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another").

In the play-within-the-play, the player king is a representation not only of the dead King Hamlet but of Claudius, an usurper who plays at being the true king ("a king of shreds and patches"), and brings to mind the way Richard II is represented continually as one who can say, "thus play I in one person many people." "The Murder of Gonzago" is a representation of the main play's actuality. But this actuality is itself the matter of a play, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. And this flow of theatricality expands outward from the edge of the stage. Those ranks of interested spectators in the Danish court who watch the performance by the visiting players are mirrored by the theater filled with the spectators of *Hamlet*. Each spectator in either audience is, besides, not only a viewer of the action but an actor, too. "All the world's a stage," as Jacques says in *As You Like It*. We who watch *Hamlet* are not only spectators but actors in parts prescribed—some larger cosmic theater enclosing us.

That Shakespeare did not take the Revenge plot altogether seriously is signified by the way he let its coherence lapse. Much has been made of Hamlet's reasons for delay. He himself gives no reasons. What is clear is that his slowness to execute revenge

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against Claudius is not due to the explanation available in his sources—that it is difficult to get at a monarch surrounded by his guards; Shakespeare omits the guards present in these earlier versions of the story. Hamlet never complains of lack of opportunity. Though he pretends to be mad it is not evident what purpose this really serves; in the revenge plays it diverts suspicion while in *Hamlet* it actually arouses it, and it is not always clear if or when Hamlet is pretending to be crazy or when indulging in a bizarre humor or when expressing his desperate but sane anguish. The soliloquies seem even more disconnected from the action surrounding them than is true in other plays of the type. The first announces Hamlet's desire for suicide—that this "too too solid flesh would melt"—without justifying cause beyond his mother's remarriage, since he still has not learned about his father's murder. In "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I," having just heard the player's Pyrrhus-Hecuba speech, Hamlet reproaches himself because he can "say nothing" to match such passion, then shifts, illogically, to accuse himself of having been like "a whore" who can only "unpack [his] heart with words" instead of acting. "To be or not to be," following shortly upon his resolution to confirm Claudius' guilt by means of his expectable reaction to "The Murder of Gonzago," reverts to the theme of suicide so inappropriately that some scholars feel that it must have been misplaced in the texts we have. "How all occasions do inform against me," which follows the appearance of Fortinbras and his troops in the fourth act, renews his resolution ("from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody") when the moment for action may well be passed, even though it is at this time that Hamlet most clearly reproaches himself ("I do not know / Why yet I live to say this thing's to do, / Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means / To do't"). The fact of the matter is that he is about to board ship in forced exile to England. But precisely these "weaknesses," these denials of the dramatic coherence the standard Revenge plot provides, open up larger questions of human identity and destiny. In his indifference to causality even when available in his models, Shakespeare reveals the nature of his struggle to evade tradition and audience expectations.

There is a discrepancy between the hero and the play, but this results from what I take to be a general skepticism to be felt in the tragic plays Shakespeare would write from *Hamlet* on—a skepti-

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cism threatening our confidence in the consistency of character and in the linking of character to either its origin in outer circumstance or its effect in action. The cavalier way in which Shakespeare ignores the logic that his sources often provide, inferior as they are, has not been sufficiently observed—so great is our admiration for his wonderful art. But as he does in the case of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare will actually reduce the motivation available in his source for *Macbeth*. In Macbeth he seems to want to show us the *inexplicable* spectacle of a good man doing an evil deed. *Othello*, also, ignores the suggestion of comprehensible causes for Iago's malignity which Shakespeare's source provides. And it is not only Iago who is "motiveless," as Coleridge said, having no real reason for his fiendish malice. Othello's jealousy arises from provocation so inadequate that it is difficult to understand how anyone so reasonable could have been inflamed by it—and so, Iago's persuasive powers must be made nearly demonic. In acting out his preposterous rage Othello's character must be temporarily transformed from what it was.

Hamlet is a mystery play, and concealment and secrecy are essential to its style, but they serve, also, to reinforce the idea that appearances, like the actor's role, are deceptive. The ghost itself is forbidden, it tells Hamlet, to tell the secrets of its prison house; otherwise, it could a tale unfold of horrors to make the hearer's hair stand on end like porcupine quills! The murder is known only to the perpetrator; Claudius' guilt is "occulted." As the ghost relates, Hamlet's father was killed, significantly, by poison in the ear, "by which the whole ear of Denmark is by a forged process of my death rankly abused." Hamlet himself continues to keep it secret, swearing Horatio and Marcellus to silence not only about the ghost but about his plans to assume a mask himself, to put on an "antic disposition" to hide his purposes. Of course the usurping murderer is the supreme example of dissembling; and Hamlet cannot get over the way "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." The play is full of spying—another way of seeing those spectatorial moments when a hidden witness watches a performance as though shown in a theater. Polonious, who sends a spy to look into the life abroad of his own son, is ludicrous and inefficient in his secret-service surveillance of Hamlet, and dies for his spying upon the Prince. Only when he is dead is he said by Hamlet to be, at last, "most still, most secret, and most grave." But

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deception and disguise do not break down, finally, to reveal the unchangeable truth—as in detective fiction; the character of Hamlet remains identified only with a succession of appearances.

As the play, in the first act, shifts from Hamlet to the Polonius family, Laertes' counsel to his sister to resist the sweet speeches of the Prince suggests that human nature, especially a prince's, is determined by social position—and has no other meaning. "He may not, as unvalued persons do, / Carve for himself, for on his choice depends / The sanctity and health of this whole state." Hamlet's love is definable only by his limited power to "give his saying deed." Polonius' advice to his son, which seems a string of stale truisms—because so often repeated as counsel to the young—boils down to the idea that self-expression should not be attempted. "Give thy thoughts no tongue, / Nor any unproportioned thought his act." But if the self should not be expressed, what is the meaning of the famous conclusion, "This above all, to thine own self be true"? Is there a self to which one can be "true" without letting it be heard or seen in speech and action? To Ophelia he gives advice that echoes her brother's resort to the familiar metaphor of theatrical costume. Hamlet's vows, he tells her, wear false vesture (he uses the unusual word "investments"). They plead "unholy suits" while pretending holy intent. The idea that personal reality is something shaped or "carved," not inherent in character, may be implied even when Hamlet facetiously ponders with Polonius over the shapes of clouds. He seems to have in mind the arbitrariness of all our interpretations which impose form and meaning on the meaningless, but it has been noted that the passage resembles one in *Antony and Cleopatra* when Antony says to Eros, after describing cloud shapes that resemble now this, now that,

> My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
> Even such a body. Here I am Antony
> Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave

I suspect that in *Hamlet* the talk about clouds also implies something about the way our characters seem fixed in one form or another but are really capable of infinite change. Hamlet tells Ophelia that he has "more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them

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in." He is all potentiality. There is no limit to the unenacted, unthought, unimagined "offences" of which he might be capable.

Hamlet's first utterance in the play is a reference to the problematic relation of essence and appearance and, at the same time, to the representation of this problem by the theatrical. He comes on stage clothed in the black of mourning, and the Queen, already speaking metaphorically, asks him for a change of mood, saying, "cast thy nighted colour off." She asks him why death "seems so particular" to him, and he answers,

> Seems, madam? nay it is. I know not seems.
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play,
> But I have that within which passes show—
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

This is more complex than appears at first glance. Hamlet is not saying that he has put on a false appearance to cover a true self. He does not deny the message of his appearance, for it declares his grief. Yet the way he looks and behaves constitutes *only* signs, after all, "actions that a man might play" as on the stage, a collection of gestures established by tradition for a role and easily enacted by the accomplished actor. If there is an inner mystery of some sort it is one that escapes all arts of action or expression and can hardly be spoken of, for no terms of description or manifestation exist for it. Shakespeare, the creator of theatrical character, expresses his own recognition of the conventionality of all the ways in which drama represents the self, and also the conventionality and insufficiency of all self-conceptions by means of which men and women carry on.

Hamlet resists all typological confinement. Is he bold or hesitating, passionate or sluggish, loving or cold, refined or coarse? The evidence for the first term in these pairs is what attracts us to him, yet the evidence for the second set of terms is

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plentiful—and those many attempts to summarize his character and explain his behavior in a unitary way must founder. Some of his negative aspects are off-putting enough to threaten his position as the hero. His reluctance to kill Claudius when he was kneeling in prayer—because then he might not send him straight to hell—shocked Dr. Johnson. His contrived killing of his sleazy false friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, has seemed to many to be something that should have been beneath him. He is too brutal and vulgar with his mother and Ophelia. Yet we endure these spectacles for the glimpses given of that noble nature that Ophelia remembers, his tender filial memory and his appreciation of Horatio's friendship, and his generosity to the rash Laertes, who deals him his death blow. And the elevation of his mind, his play of wit and philosophy, his keen understanding of others and of society. Horatio's loyalty is a warrant we accept, for Horatio is our representative in the play—the sensible, decent, ordinary man who gives his complete loyalty to someone worthy of it. But the contradictions remain. Shakespeare's hero may be seen as someone who wants to be undetermined, unclassifiable, though, ultimately, he can find no selfhood outside of prescribed forms, no history but in established plots. He cannot be anything other than the Revenger the play sets out to make him.

Some say too quickly that Hamlet is a humour type—a melancholic, or a victim of an excess of black bile; he himself wonders if the devil has not been able to delude him with a false ghost "out of my weakness and my melancholy, / As he is very potent with such spirits." Then there is his madness to which one might refer his inconsistency; sometimes put on but perhaps not always. At the very end he apologizes to Laertes for his intemperate wrath.

> I am punished
> With a sore distraction. What I have done,
> That might your nature, honour and exception
> Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.

But neither melancholy nor madness is really the right explanation for the overmastering philosophic doubt—and the mood that leads to Hamlet's desire for death. In *Hamlet* the incoherence of what men do is profoundly and continuously explored. The famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy at the beginning of the

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third act, spoken on the day the court play is to be presented, says not a word about this imminent test of Hamlet's suspicions and does not mention revenge. The question it opens is, most critics have supposed, again the issue of suicide. "To be" may be read as, simply, "to live," and "not to be" as, simply, "to die." If this is the choice that poses "the question" and if it is meant to be paralleled (A:B as C:D) in the alternatives then offered—whether it is "nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing, end them"—one must assume, somewhat implausibly, that the ending of his troubles by the taking of arms against them is deliberate and certain suicide. But the choice is phrased so abstractly that one can also say that these terms are syntactically in opposition ("chiasmatically," their order reversed to make the comparison A:B as D:C) with the ideas of passive suffering and active battle. In this way, to act is "to be." Merely to feel is "not to be." Hamlet may be reflecting that there is no being aside from our deeds. Still, are we only our acts? If Hamlet seems to be appealing to an "inmost part" of Gertrude when, in the closet scene, he proposes to set a glass before her in which she may view her true self, he also pleads with her to be an actress, "to assume a virtue if you have it not," with the hope that the appearance of virtue will, somehow, create an essence.

That Hamlet is inconsistent, variable, even uncertain himself as to who he is—this corresponds to his skepticism about human conceptions in general. The play, we must remember, is contemporaneous with Montaigne's *Essays.* Florio's English translation was published in London only months, perhaps, after the staging of Shakespeare's play. Perhaps Shakespeare saw the Florio Montaigne even before it was published; the very phraseology of the English version as well as Montaigne's balancing of contrary arguments is echoed, some think, in the soliloquies. Hamlet brings Montaigne to mind when he says about Denmark being a prison, "There's nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so"—a reflection expressed in Montaigne's essay, "That the taste of goods or evils doth greatly depend on the opinion we have of them." But Montaigne particularly denied the stability—or even reality—of personal essence, saying, "there is no constant existence, neither of our being, nor of the objects. We have no communication with being, for every human nature is ever in the

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middle between being born and dying, giving nothing of itself but an obscure appearance and shadow." Montaigne also wrote, in the essay, "Of the Inconstancie of our Actions," "We are all framed of flaps and patches and of so shapeless and diverse a contexture, that every peece and every moment playeth his part. And there is as much difference found betweene us and our selves, as there is betweene our selves and other." What being we have, then, is only what we assume in that phantasmic play in which we struggle to escape and to fulfill an idea of ourselves which owes its shape to cultural formulations.

"All the world's a stage" has so long been a platitude that one is apt to forget how revolutionary it might have sounded when first uttered, and how the idea is likely to shock us still when expressed by a modern thinker like Clifford Geertz in his well-known statement, "There is no such thing as human nature independent of culture." In Shakespeare's time the tension felt by those who adventured out of the bounds of inherited status—new classes, new professions—was intense, and what one was, as an individual, became more problematic. The process that Stephen Greenblatt calls "Renaissance self-fashioning" was strenuous and fraught with anxiety. For Shakespeare, a "new man" who was making a name and a fortune for himself in a once-despised trade, the problem of selfhood was fundamental. But the literature of the theater, changing with such rapidity in the few years of his participation, directly dramatized the contest between prescribed form and innovation. The standardized types into which mankind might be classified were no longer fixed in society nor were they for more than a moment useful literary conventions. What Shakespeare thinks of such types is represented in his portrait of Laertes—the perfect avenger, but stupid and not really so honorable when he consents to have his rapier poisoned in order to make sure he will win the duel with Hamlet. Osric, the courtier fop, a comic type himself, is the spokesman for fading categories when he describes Laertes in typecasting terms as the "absolute gentleman . . . the card or calendar of gentry; for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see."

Hamlet's personal speeches, even aside from the soliloquies, often express an excessive despair that has baffled the critics. He tells Rosencrantz and Gildenstern,

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> I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises, and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appeareth no other thing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

It is complained that Hamlet's expression of such thoughts to such auditors, who can only respond with stupid snickers, is preposterous. Besides, he does know why he has lost all his mirth. The explanation generally offered is that he is trying to throw these spies off the scent. The Cambridge editor of the play says, "So often pointed to as a brilliant perception of the anguish of Renaissance man in general and of Hamlet in particular, it is a glorious blind, a flight of rhetoric by which a divided and distressed soul conceals the true nature of his distress and substitutes a formal and conventional state of *Weltschmerz*." But I would say that the instinctive response of reader or hearer to the power of the famous speech is sounder than this critical insistence upon its plot-logic. Hamlet has ceased to be, as he so often ceases to be, simply the character whose motives advance the plot. What he expresses is the root of his gloom, his sense of the paradox in the contradictions of human nature. Hamlet's desire for suicide, which continually erupts in the midst of the action and seems to have no sufficient explanation in the plot, derives from the discrepancy between what is felt and what is done that the play will go on to reinforce after the first soliloquy. To lose all one's mirth without apparent cause is to be someone whose altered response to life is all-inclusive and goes beyond specific occasions. In contrast with his ghostly, impalpable sense of self, the outer man and his roles are "too too solid."

Hamlet's "lunacy," as Polonius calls it, may have been apparent before Hamlet heard the ghost's tale. His melancholy, as the first soliloquy showed, has already aroused that loathing for sexuality which even causes him to wish that his own flesh would melt. But he can put on the madman act, as he shows in his exuberant

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teasing of Polonius or of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—and yet baffle them by the famous "method" in his madness. Ophelia's report to her father about Hamlet's strange behavior makes it appear that he has been driven out of his mind by the repulse she has administered at her father's command. Polonius is conversant enough with conventional typology to recognize in Ophelia's description the standard symptoms of what was called "love ecstasy." But the audience may legitimately suspect it was all "an act"—an exhibition of that pretended madness Hamlet has resolved upon. Beyond this uncertainty, however, I want to point out another which is generally overlooked. Simulated or no, Hamlet's appearance of madness is a representation of the fragility of that notion of identity in which he has ceased to believe. It is this uncertainty that is even expressed in Ophelia's authentic mad talk. "Lord, we know what we are, but we know not what we may be," she says. Is not madness what we call "not being oneself"—an alienation from the essential consistency one prefers to believe in? But what if one has ceased to believe in it? By keeping us in continual doubt about Hamlet's madness, Shakespeare raises this suspicion of essences and of any truth beyond appearance.

Hamlet's transformation into an avenger requires him to surrender, as much as he can, his character as lover. He has sworn to the ghost that he will wipe away from the table of his memory "all trivial fond records" and let only the ghost's command remain. In this process his previous character has been constricted. The nature of man as a sexual being, and of woman as one, also, is reduced. From the outset of the play Hamlet is oppressed by the idea of sex as a perversion; his mother has caused him to look at the consummation of marriage with loathing, as an incestuous horror. In retrospect, he regards even her feeling for his father as a kind of gluttony: "she would hang on him / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on." No one is chaste in the Danish court—not even Ophelia, in his view. It is unnecessary, I think, to psychologize this, as has so often been done—to see Hamlet as suffering from oedipal fixation on his mother, hatred for the usurper father now represented by Claudius. Hamlet's rejection of the "normal" sexual and familial set of attitudes is still another mark of the shrinking of identity with which he is afflicted.

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Does Hamlet ever come close to accepting entirely—or rejecting without question—the Revenger model? There is one moment when, I believe, he invokes it consciously—and puts it aside. As he goes to meet his mother in the third act he revs himself up with an old-style invocation of dark powers—then dismisses their prompting,

> 'Tis now the very witching time of night,
> When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
> Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,
> And do such bitter business as the day
> Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.
> O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
> The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.
> Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
> I will speak daggers to her but use none.

"When churchyards yawn" is a reminder to himself of the ghost who returned from the realm of death to lay its demand upon him. Now it is the "witching hour," as we still say, when he "could drink hot blood," as murdering witches were believed to drink the blood of their victims. Now he could do the unnamable horror that "the day would quake to look on." But he draws back. He will "speak daggers" to his mother but he will not commit the crime of Nero, the matricide. He calls upon something almost never acknowledged in this drama of borrowed, fabricated selfhood—upon the promptings of the heart, "of nature." But it is not "nature" that keeps him from killing the King when he comes upon him in prayer—on the way to the Queen.

"Nature" as a term for an original human nature that persists despite the impositions of borrowed form appears rarely in *Hamlet.* The principal reference that comes to mind is that curious comment on Danish drunkenness which Hamlet makes as he listens in the first act to the "heavy-headed revel" of the royal wedding feast. Hamlet speaks here of "nature" as a source of human defect: "So oft it chances in particular men, / That for some vicious mole of nature in them, / As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty, / Since nature cannot choose his origin." The passage, deleted from the Folio, seems out of place as a reflection Hamlet might make as he waits for his father's ghost to appear—

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except, perhaps, for the fact that the ghost refers to his own "days of nature" when he committed the crimes for which he suffers now.

But "histrionics" is never discarded altogether by Hamlet. He had wondered, after hearing the player's recital, that he himself was so inferior in expression, having "the motive and the cue for passion" that he had. He found himself in competition with an actor who lacked his own great "cue": "What's Hecuba to him?" He is in a similar competition later on, in the fourth act, with the Norwegian Prince, Fortinbras. Fortinbras, who has put aside his original desire to revenge his own father's death and recover his property, now marches to Poland with an army of twenty thousand to gain a worthless scrap of land, finding "quarrel in a straw"—while Hamlet, "a father killed, a mother stained," still has not acted. And Hamlet is stirred and humbled by such an exhibition of pure performance without motive—which is really like the actor's. "How all occasions do inform against me / And stir my dull revenge," he begins his last soliloquy.

> Witness this army of such mass and charge,
> Led by a delicate and tender prince,
> Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd
> Makes mouths at the invisible event,
> Exposing what is mortal and unsure
> To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
> Even for an eggshell.

The difficulty with Fortinbras' presence in the play has not been addressed properly by the critics. Most commentators think of him in comparison or contrast with Hamlet because he is heard of at the very beginning as a son aroused to reprisal by a father's cruel death; one is tempted to see a parallel between him and Laertes and even ancient Pyrrhus as instances of unhesitating filial action. Laertes really is a misguided hothead and Pyrrhus a butcher who makes Hecuba, with her copious tears, a foil to Gertrude who has dried her own too quickly. But they fulfill their avenger roles. Fortinbras, however, disappears as an avenger promptly. Claudius averts his threat to Denmark by sending envoys to Fortinbras' uncle, the King of Norway—and by return mail, one might say, news arrives that this rash young man has

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promised to give up his personal project and embrace instead an assignment to lead his soldiers elsewhere. Has he any persisting role in the play? Well, someone has to be there at the end to pick up the pieces and assume the throne—Horatio would hardly do as Denmark's new king; he is not a royal person. The great Harvard Shakespearean, George Lyman Kittredge, made the matter even simpler. The dramatic character of highest rank customarily spoke the speech which brings an Elizabethan play to a close, and so "this accounts for the presence of Fortinbras in *Hamlet*. But for him there would be no one left of sufficient rank to fulfill this office." But there may be a special meaning in the resemblance of Hamlet's late envy of Fortinbras and his early envy of the stage actor who performs his part with such noble fervor. In both cases it does not seem to matter that the brilliant performances of the theatrical actor and the soldier are without personal motive. Their merely spectacular action for action's sake seems superior to Hamlet's inadequate expression of what he calls "excitements of my reason and my blood." Hamlet's envy even expresses that existential lack of confidence in essences and in the connection of character and deed which is at the heart of the play, for only acts, in this skeptical view, count, not intention. Pragmatically, Man is no more than "a beast" if "capability and godlike reason . . . fust in us unus'd." Inner selfhood has no real existence compared to the show of those who "find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at the stake." Earlier, in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, as I have noted, "to be," may be interpretable as action, mere "in the mind to suffer" as "not to be." But such a challenge to the importance of essential being and the necessary relation it bears to doing may have been too radical and disturbing a skepticism for Shakespeare's audience. Because Hamlet seems finally ready to acknowledge his laggardliness as an avenger, modern directors often retain the fourth act Fortinbras passages even though self-reproach seems out of place at a moment when Hamlet has been rendered powerless and is a virtual prisoner. Shakespeare might have had second thoughts about this dramatic illogic. But, besides, the skeptical paradox posed by the Fortinbras model was bound to puzzle many. This final soliloquy of Hamlet and the preceding scene which provokes it are found in the quarto, probably Shakespeare's own earlier script, but they are absent from the later Folio text of *Hamlet*, the

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longest of such cuts in a revision which may have been made with the playwright's consent. Perhaps the acting company's director or even Shakespeare himself cried "Cut!" at this point when the play was first run through.

Death, of course, is the ultimate loss of selfhood, and the jesting of the gravediggers and of Hamlet in the last act is not merely comedy but reflects that mystery. Where are those selfhoods of the politician, the courtier, the lawyer, "with his quiddities now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks," of the lady painting herself an inch thick, and of Alexander the Great and Caesar, and of Yorick? Yet it is precisely at this moment when the awfulness of the loss of identity by death is brought to mind that Hamlet is also made to recall his own childhood, when, as a little boy, he was carried on Yorick's shoulders. When he leaps into Ophelia's grave to contest with Laertes, it is not only with the declaration of the love he has denied, but with a momentary sense of recovered selfhood. "This is I, Hamlet the Dane," he shouts in thrilling tones as though setting himself into history along with his father, who bore the same name. Yet this renewed identity is, after all, the rage of the old action-man that his father was and expected him to be. To Laertes, he says in a desire not to be exceeded, "Woo't weep, woo't fight, woo't fast, woo't tear thyself? / Woo't drink up eisel [vinegar], eat a crocodile? / I'll do it."

Finally, Hamlet is ready to acknowledge how impossible it is to avoid role-playing. He will accept the end shaped for him in the role he has been unable to elude. Describing to Horatio how he had—accidentally—discovered and foiled the plot against him on the ship taking him to England, and sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths, he says,

> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
> When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us
> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will—

A good many critics have found Hamlet's easy disposal of this paltry pair, "no shriving-time allowed," as somehow too brutal for the "sweet prince" we love, and wince at the fact that when he kills Claudius at last it is not only with the "envenom'd" rapier but, gratuitously, by a forced swallow from the cup of poisoned wine as

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well. But Hamlet has accepted the Revenger role, and the crude ruthlessness which goes with it, by this time. The divinity that shapes our ends is commonly thought to be a reference to God's determination, to which, it is said, Hamlet at last acquiesces. But the religious note is so scantily sounded in this play that one may as properly think of the shaping force Hamlet calls "a divinity" as simply Destiny—something assigned to us as much by custom and circumstance as by Divine intention. Hamlet may be alluding to Matthew 10:19 when he tells Horatio, as he prepares for his duel with Laertes, "There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all." But his sense of ineluctable necessity is a part of the acceptance of the role into which he has been "shaped" by determinants that are not necessarily heavenly. I think of them, in relation to my idea of Shakespeare and his times, as the determinants Geertz refers to when he speaks of "culture" as the definer of character.

The ghost (very uncertainly a divine messenger; there is strong Protestant theological argument behind Hamlet's idea that it could be an impersonating fiend) appears as an agent whose task it is to haunt Hamlet literally and figuratively with reminder of his Revenger role. In the closet scene with Gertrude it appears to "whet [Hamlet's] almost blunted purpose." Hamlet has passionately inveighed against her "act / That roars so loud and thunders in the index"—her marriage to his uncle, "in the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed, / Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty"—but has said not a word about the murder. There is a tradition that Shakespeare himself took the part of the ghost in performance. In a sense it is Shakespeare who is both haunted and haunting. It is he himself who tries to escape the expectations of his audience—yet, ultimately, cannot really do so. As the play wears on, the ghost quite disappears. At the last, when its appeal for revenge is about to be answered, Hamlet hardly speaks at all about his father except to mention that he used his signet to seal the death warrant of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and to refer to the murder of his father (whom he now calls, more impersonally, "my king") as one item only in his charges against his uncle:

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He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother
Popped in between th'election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cozenage—is't not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damned
To let the canker of our nature come
To further evil?

—a speech in which, among other reasons for killing Claudius, one hears of frustrate ambition, which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had scented in Hamlet (much to one's annoyance, when one heard them say so). The word "revenge," which one would expect to hear at the end, is never sounded. Hamlet, in a last reminder of theatricality, turns to the audience in the theater as well as to witnesses on the stage when, dying, he says,

You that look pale, and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act
Had I but time, as this fell sergeant death
Is strict in his arrest, oh I could tell you—
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

But what account of Hamlet Horatio will give is no longer clear. "Story," in a received sense, the story of Hamlet and his "cause"—has collapsed, and Horatio now speaks only of the "accidental" and "casual" and mistaken chances that produced the carnage on the stage. He does not speak of revenge, that chain of calculated steps leading inexorably to conclusion.

How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fallen on th'inventors' heads.

If there is another story to tell, only the play itself tells it.

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VIRGINIA HARTMAN

The Conveyance of Sound

The doctor will be here in a moment, Mr. Cameron." The nurse pulled the door behind her as she left, and I turned toward Tommy, sitting at the end of the examining table, his white-sheathed arms wrapped around himself in an involuntary embrace.

"What happened?" I said. My voice echoed in the bare room.

He looked down at his dangling feet, the only limbs still free. He moved them aimlessly as if he were sitting on a dock, cooling his toes in the water. He acted like he belonged here, like it wasn't all a mistake. But it had to be.

"Tommy, what happened?" I repeated, with a bit more force than I'd intended. He didn't answer. That used to be his way of getting at me—acting vacant, giving me a "Duhhh . . . " when he didn't feel like answering. Now, he wasn't kidding. He was sitting at the edge of that table like an idiot—so help me, that's exactly what was going through my mind—my older brother looking like the village idiot. I took him by the shoulders of that awful jacket and said, "Tommy, tell me what is going on!" He looked at me—an unfocused, distant stare—and then he looked away.

I felt someone's hand on my shoulder, and heard a soft voice say, "Mr. Cameron, why don't you join me in the next room?"

It was a thin, severe-looking, middle-aged woman with black hair pulled tightly back in a barrette. On her coat was embroidered in cursive writing, "Dr. Landis." She was the man in the white coat, I thought. The one who comes to take you away.

We stood behind a one-way mirror and watched Tommy from the other room. I couldn't shake the sensation that all this really wasn't happening, that sooner or later I'd wake up. I'd call Tom and we'd laugh about this dream. I touched the glass in front of me. It was solid.

Tommy went back to watching his feet. The doctor must have been standing back here before, observing my brother and me

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like two bugs in a jar. She had probably been sizing me up, too, diagnosing me.

"Could you please take that jacket off him?" I said.

"Yes, we will," she said. Her voice was a low whisper. "He doesn't seem to be a danger to himself anymore." She stood behind me, the two of us peeping through the glass at Tom. "I was hoping that you might be able to elicit a reaction," she said.

I was going to ask her what happened, but before I could ask, she began to tell me. Tommy had called the crisis center shouting, she said, shouting that something was about to happen. When the operator asked what he meant, Tom said something like, "I just need some talk-back!"

"Talk-back? What is that?" I said.

She didn't know. She thought I might know. She waited, then continued. After he said this, he accused the operator of not wanting to listen to him, and dropped the receiver, leaving it off the hook. When the paramedics got to his building he was on the roof, sitting out on the edge of a cornice, dangling his feet, just as he sat now on the examining table. According to the rescue team, when they pulled him back to safety, he flailed and resisted, but he didn't say a word.

The doctor stopped talking. I felt like screaming at Tommy, "Cut it out!" but with that glass between us, my words would have only bounced back to me, unheard. The doctor, standing at my shoulder, resumed speaking in her low tone, telling me that it might have been an isolated incident, but then what about his unresponsive state? Had he been acting erratically? Had he been depressed? No, no, I said. I couldn't think. The last thing I heard her say was that they'd keep him there for observation, and then I stopped listening.

Pulling out of the dark parking lot I passed the "St. Mark's Hospital" sign, and I thought of the directions Annie and I gave people who were driving to our house for the first time. We used this place as a landmark. "Turn left at the loony bin," we always said. Ha ha.

When I got home, it was almost dawn. The blinds filtered lines of light over Annie, who was twisted up with the bedsheets and lying diagonally. I stood at the doorway of our bedroom and for a moment admired the straight lines falling into this room I'd

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designed—its length, width, and height all equal, with my lovely jumble of a wife in the center, now striped with twilight. I nudged her feet over to her side of the bed, lay down, and let her have the covers.

"I'm going home now, Elizabeth," she said, clear as day. Annie talks in her sleep. She talks a lot in her waking life, too, though that doesn't seem quite so odd. I don't know, though, the sleep-talking doesn't really bother me. It's actually kind of soothing to hear someone talking at night.

I thought I'd try to sleep a little before the alarm rang. I was wired, but I still managed to close my eyes and drift off. As my mind dropped over the edge, I felt myself physically falling . . . and some shred of consciousness told me to wake up. I came back to the darkened bedroom with a jolt, but it took a moment for my heart to slow. I heard someone speak, but it was only Annie, babbling on. I lay awake and listened. Her intermittent conversations with me and others, somewhere on the other side of consciousness, were comforting. Tommy used to talk at night. Maybe she was talking to him.

I got up and went to work that day, but I went to St. Mark's on my lunch hour. I didn't see Dr. Landis. Tom was in a semiprivate room, sharing space with an ancient man in a wheelchair, who was about as communicative as my brother. "Hi," I said, too loudly, too cheerfully. The old man looked scornful. I pulled the curtain.

Tom stared straight ahead. His face was sallow, and the blond hairs at his temple were matted. I wasn't sure what to do. "Annie says to say hi, Tom." I was speaking as if he were deaf, or senile. He did look older, somehow—not elderly, but older than thirty-one, surely, the way he stared straight in front of him, his jaw slack, his skin devoid of color. It wasn't a matter of wrinkles—I was a year younger, and I had more worry lines than he had. "Annie really wanted to come with me," I said, "but she had to give a big test or something." I paused, leaving a space where he might say something, anything. "Can you imagine? Third-graders getting a midterm? I don't remember even having tests when we were that young. Do you?"

I felt foolish—I didn't know what to say. I didn't even know what was wrong with him, why he was here. They'd taken blood

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and tested for drugs, but I could have told them it wasn't that. He wouldn't even take Sominex when I'd suggested it.

"That stuff is addictive, David," he'd told me not a week before.

Whatever the cause, I didn't like having to keep up this goofy, one-sided conversation with my brother. I've never been the talker of the family, never had to be. Tommy was always there, speaking for me, even when I didn't need him to. When we were little and somebody would ask me how old I was, he'd say, "He's eight!" Or they'd ask me what kind of sandwich I wanted and he'd say, "He likes peanut butter!" Some people said he talked too much, but I never objected. We were two peas in a pod, my mother used to say—two halves of a whole. We even looked alike. There's a picture of us that Annie framed and put in the guest bedroom—Tommy and me at about six and five, sitting side by side in a big easy chair, wearing matching white T-shirts. Tommy's elbow rests casually on my shoulder. His hand, without purpose, gently touches the top of my head. I felt the need now to touch Tom, to reach him, but I was helpless to know how.

The hook of a crane swung a steel beam past the elevator cage, and as it rose I thought about my brother, my talkative brother, afraid of heights, quietly dangling his feet over the side of a fourteen-story building. I wondered if he had even been aware of the sirens which must have blared just below him.

The cage stopped and I walked out onto the work site. My tie riffled in the sudden breeze, and my boots shook the plywood floor. Gardner, the VP I'd been dealing with all the way through the project, came toward me and said something, but the sound of a metal drill drowned him out. I unrolled a fresh copy of my black-line drawings. Gardner was a nice guy, but he was always asking for things that he should have brought up before we drafted all the plans. "You've got to listen to him—he's the customer," my boss kept reminding me. Listening to him wasn't the problem; it was readjusting everything to accommodate him.

Gardner's most recent request had been more soundproofing for the executive boardroom, and it hadn't required major revisions. Still, he wanted a detailed explanation of the way the changes would accomplish what he wanted. I've seen it before in clients, they don't really want you to explain, they just want you to hold their hand. They talk, you nod and say you understand, and

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then you throw some terms at them so they think you know what you're doing. I reassured him that the conveyance of sound, or, in this case, the non-conveyance, was one of my specialties.

"Look," I said, and I pointed to the plans. "Even if someone is standing right here, right by the door, with this design he doesn't have a chance of hearing what's going on inside. It all has to do with trapping the sound, leaving a space between the walls where the sound can go, and using the right materials so that it's absorbed. If we create that quiet space between two rooms, then the sound is caught, absorbed, and only those on the inside can hear."

He looked at me blankly, but I guess he was satisfied. I have to admit, I didn't pay close attention. I'm usually extremely focused when I work, but I found my mind wandering. I was thinking about Tommy. He and I used to build things in the back yard—elaborate tree forts with ropes and pulleys and platforms. The platforms were never too high—Tommy's caveat—but our constructions were still great feats of engineering. We had planned to form our own company: Cameron Brothers, Architects. We should have done that, I thought, as if Tommy were there, as if I were telling it to him.

We didn't do it, of course. I kept thinking of it as a real plan, but in junior high, when I started to love math, Tom found it too easy, too logical. Instead, he excelled in "written and verbal skills." I called him "Mr. Essay Contest" to make him mad.

Once he was asked to read a prize-winning essay he had written, in front of the entire school. You'd think that reading aloud would be easy for a guy who could talk so much, but when his name was announced there was a long pause, then a murmur, and then all the kids started to get unruly. Finally, this nun came to the microphone looking all flushed and windblown and said, "We are going to proceed to the final part of the program, the closing prayer. Father?"

Tom was in the bathroom puking his guts out. That night as he was lying in the twin bed parallel to mine, just as I was falling asleep, he said, "You know what the thing about it was, Dave?"

"What, Tom?"

"The thing about it was, I wasn't even very scared right before. It was just when they announced me that I knew I was gonna puke."

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"Mm-hm," I said. I was thinking about my design for a toothpick tower I was building for the science fair, and I was right on the edge of sleep.

Tommy would always do that to me. He'd always start a conversation right as I was about to drift off. And he'd always ask me a question first—"You know what the thing about it is, Dave?"—so that I'd have to answer, I'd have to be awake, I'd have to let him know I was giving him my full attention.

"So why did you?" I said.

"Puke, you mean? I don't know. I mean, all those people were looking at me, seeing if I was going to say something smart."

"You say smart stuff all the time," I said, my eyes still closed.

"Yeah, but, it's different when I say stuff, like to you. Then it just comes out."

"Well it just came out in the john, didn't it?" I heard him laugh, and laughed myself, then settled back on my pillow and began again to drift.

Sometimes, though, when he'd finish on one subject, and I'd be giving in to the darkness behind my eyelids at last, he'd start on something else. "Because you know the thing about it, Dave?" And If I didn't answer, he'd say, "Dave?"

And I'd say, "What, Tom?" And he'd go off on another subject: why writing essays suited his temperament, or why the reckless compliment he'd given to Mary Jo Caponati that day really didn't make any difference, or why cross-country was number one for him, and it wasn't a feeb sport, no matter what anybody said, or something else I'd be required to respond to, another "Right, Dave?" interrupting my latest journey toward sleep. He wouldn't dismiss me from these conversations until he heard me snoring.

Occasionally it bugged me, but the year he went off to college and left me at home to finish my senior year, I could never get to sleep. It was too quiet.

I visited the hospital again, and I ran into Dr. Landis, who asked me into her office. She said Tommy's silence was surely a symptom of a depression. She talked to me about depression for at least ten minutes, until I was depressed myself. "But how are you going to get him to talk?" I said, finally.

"I thought you might tell me that," she said.

I entered Tom's room, and, having come to realize it was better

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to ignore the roommate, I pulled the curtain and resumed the ridiculous small talk I had begun the first day. "Hi, guy!" I said, sounding like a game-show host. I'd brought lunch for both of us, just in case food might make an impression. Tom had always loved to eat, and when he was a runner, never gained any weight. Lately, though, he'd started to look a bit cherubic. I offered him a sandwich, but there was no response. I ate mine, and tried to keep up a patter. How did those morning DJs ever do it—sound friendly and funny, while they talked nonstop into nothing but air? My own speech was halting and forced. I finally couldn't stand it anymore. I left Tom's sandwich on the table next to his bed and got out of there.

I started the ignition, dialed my secretary and told her I'd been detained. Pulling away from the hospital, I turned the car away from the direction of my office and just kept driving until Tulsa was almost behind me—until I began to see open space. The land around Tulsa is flat, like home. Not quite as green as Indiana, but similar in the way that the sky is big and meets the land someplace beyond where I could ever travel. Back in high school, Tom's cross-country route would take him out into the country. I imagined seeing him out here in this slightly drier landscape, his skinny high-school self running as if he hoped the road would never end.

I always envied him his running, not because I couldn't run—I was a sprinter—but because it was an extended period of time when Tom was away from me, and silent. He loved just to go, for long stretches. If I needed him, though, like to talk about something, he'd ditch practice. He was like that—not just to me, but to everyone. You'd know something was important to him, but if he saw somebody who needed something, he'd stop what he was doing and help. It wasn't uncommon to see him in the study hall, explaining Shakespeare in some teenager's vernacular, or in the neighborhood, telling stories to the younger kids. Sometimes a pack of little kids would even trail him for part of his afternoon run.

I imagined him, out in this landscape. But I couldn't pull up and ask him to get in, to help me with my problem, as he had always done in high school, because now he was the problem. Back in the hospital, Tommy was lying there expecting me to do the talking, and all I could do was fantasize that *he'd* do something

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for me, that he'd start a stream of words flowing, to comfort me with the sound he made.

I drove until the sky began to go gold, and then I turned the car around and came back toward town. But I didn't go toward either work or home. Instead, I headed toward Tommy's apartment building. I parked in the lot and called Annie. The machine picked up—her voice.

"Hi, it's me," I said. "Go ahead and eat. I'm at Tom's apartment. If you need me."

I fumbled with the keys Tom had given us in case of emergency and opened the door to find a scrawny, yellow cat wailing at me. Tom had never told me he had a cat. It screamed at me and then ran toward the kitchen, leading me to its empty dish. There was a bag of dry food on the counter that had been ripped and gnawed at, and a rough-edged hole at the bottom must have given up enough squares and stars to keep the thing alive. God knows what the cat had done for water during the past few days. I opened a can of food that was keeping cold in the otherwise empty refrigerator. The cat went wild as I filled its bowl with brown mush that smelled foul, contributing to the other strange smells in the apartment. I watched the thing bolt down its food, and then I refilled the bowl.

The place was a wreck. There were papers everywhere—strewn across the rug in the living room, stuck to the walls with little bits of tape, spread across the couch. As I walked around I saw that in addition to the papers, there were crusty dishes here and there. No wonder Tom had never invited us over. Dirty laundry covered the floor in the bedroom, the bathroom, and the hall. Almost without thinking, I began to pick up the clothes and throw them into a pile. As I did, I checked out the wall coverings: post cards of famous works of art, a typewritten sheet entitled "GOALS," and a couple of "To Do" lists with only a few items scratched out.

There was something I had to do here, and though I didn't know what it was, I knew the place was way too messy for me even to think. I'd have to get the apartment in shape before I could figure anything out. I took off my tie, rolled up my sleeves, and picked up the pile of laundry I'd assembled. The laundry room was probably in the basement—I headed out of the apartment, creating a breeze that lifted a sheet of paper stuck to the inside of the door. "PAY RENT!!!" it shouted.

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When I came back up from putting a load in the washer, I thought, *This place stinks.* But I didn't have time to get to the deep cleaning just yet. I opened the windows, but no air moved the curtains. Noises bounced off the walls of the next building: car horns, a baby crying. I looked around for the phone so I could tell Annie I'd be a while. I saw the empty base unit for a cordless phone, but God only knew where the phone itself was. I'd have to wait for it to ring before I could find it.

I gathered up the papers from the floor and the couch and sat down at the desk. You couldn't see the desktop. Even the computer monitor had little notes attached to it with ragged squares of Scotch tape. I tried to put the paperwork in order, neat piles at least. I set my watch to beep when I should go down and put Tommy's clothes in the dryer, and I sifted through the piles I had made. Maybe I should have had qualms about invading my brother's privacy, but I didn't. If I had to read his mail to find some sort of clue about his silence, then so be it. Something here might get him to talk to me.

The cat made a figure eight around my ankles. I reached down and touched it absent-mindedly, but I pulled my hand away, thinking about fleas and fur and my dark suit. Annie had a cat when we first got married. She couldn't understand why I would never pet it. She would sit, evenings, and talk and talk to the cat. I didn't mind the sound of all the cooing and stroking, though I might have preferred it for myself. When the thing ran away, I thought she'd never forgive me. "You were jealous of that cat! Admit it!" she said. I wasn't jealous. I didn't tell it to run away.

Tommy's yellow cat pushed its head against the heel of my shoe and I was suddenly profoundly glad that this one had survived the neglect.

None of the mail was very compelling. Tommy had won a million dollars, he was an instant member of an auto club, only he could stop the infringement upon his right to bear arms . . . There were also a couple of bills in there, ancient and overdue. I paid them. At the bottom of the pile were my brother's story manuscripts, full of cross-outs and scribblings, looking as though they hadn't been touched in a while. He had stopped going to the writing classes he had come to Tulsa to take.

He'd been so excited last summer when he called to tell me he was leaving Bloomington and moving here to work with this

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writing teacher. "Leaving Bloomington? No shit," I said. He'd been there since graduation—first getting a Master's Degree in Literature, which took a while, and then working at various jobs. He had worked at a bookstore, a frame-making place, a small press, and a recording studio for Books on Tape. The last job was the one he liked the best. It didn't pay much, but he'd call us from work sometimes and play choice lines onto our answering machine. "Call me Ishmael," our machine would request of us in some broadcaster's deep baritone, between beeping reminders of dentist appointments and invitations to dinner. A month or so later, a different voice would intone, "I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond." Women spoke to us too, British women mostly, about going to a lighthouse, about finding a secret garden. If I didn't know the quote I'd ask Annie. She always knew.

Through all his jobs, and even up to the time he left Bloomington, Tom still hung around with the crowd he'd been in since at least my freshman year. Rebels without a job, I called them. In college, they all went to avant-garde films and smoked Clove cigarettes and stayed up late talking about literature. I didn't have anything against them, really. I just had nothing in common with them. It was a shock when, after impatiently waiting out my senior year in high school without Tom, I got to I.U. and discovered I was not a part of his circle. When I didn't chime in on their riveting conversations, the Clove crowd decided I was a wet blanket.

So I joined a frat—guys who drank instead of talking. Tom called them cretins. Accurate, maybe, but they had their good points. It was at a frat party that I met Annie. She talked instead of drinking. She talked with her voice, her eyes, her hands. She gestured with abandon, and her speech seemed to extend through her hands, as they waved, circled, pointed and pantomimed what she was talking about. They swam in the air, reaching out to her listener, drawing me to her.

Annie's presence in my life made me seem less of a lost cause in Tom's eyes. I still had my friends, and Tom still had his, but almost every Wednesday night, Tom, Annie and I would go to the B&G Diner and drink coffee for hours. Annie and Tom would debate the future of the world. I'd sit and watch Annie's long, lean hands move excitedly—I still love those hands—and I'd

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listen to Tom's voice go up and down with each point he made. Occasionally, after making a point about which political leader was decidedly a dope, or what the citizens of the U.S. didn't know about the rest of the world, or what Shakespeare had to say about some aspect of the human condition, Tom would look at me, as if to gauge my reaction. Annie would stop then, too, and look. I'd simply say to Tom, "Go on . . . " Annie'd reach a hand out to touch mine, and then they'd be back in the heat of the issue, and I'd be as content as I ever remember being. I didn't realize it then, but those two defined me. When things were going right, the sound of their voices was all I thought I'd ever need.

But Tom wanted something else from me. What was it he wanted, for me to speak up? For me to be like him? Whatever it was, it was something I wasn't able to give. And when he didn't get it, he'd shut me out.

I guess I learned early on—from my dad—that people could disappoint you, and so I tried to stop needing Tom so much. I put my faith in other things: straight lines, good grades, getting ahead. I've put my faith in Annie, that's true, but for the most part she's been a safe bet. The bitterest moments in our marriage have been the rare times when she has, unintentionally, disappointed me. With Tom, though, since college, there's always been a certain potential of that that I couldn't bear to chance. I'd need him somehow and he'd be off with his other friends, or he'd want only to talk about something I just didn't get. Maybe that's why I moved so far away. I wanted the best for the guy, but out of self-preservation I had to try not to need anything from him.

After graduation, when I got this job offer in Tulsa, I was ready to go. Annie and I planned our wedding, with Tom as best man. "Don't move to *Tulsa*," he kept saying. But we did move, and he stayed where he was. Eight years later, he called to say he was moving here.

He stayed with us for a week or so while he looked for a place, and it was fine. He seemed in a hurry to get established on his own. His only requirements for an apartment were that it be on the ground level, because of his fear of heights, and that it be "someplace quiet." I guess so he could write his stories. He got an amazingly boring job, copy-editing the phone numbers in the Tulsa Oil Interests Directory. It was only until he found something better, he said, and anyway, he hadn't moved here for a job,

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but for this writing guy. Tom said on the phone, "He only invites writers who he thinks exhibit *promise.*" I couldn't help getting caught up in Tommy's joy, even though I had no idea what he was talking about.

I sat now at his desk and looked through the manuscripts of the stories he'd come here to write. Most of these pages had little markings, word changes and things, but the front page of one story had a big circle drawn on it, a big scribbly circle like the kind you make while talking on the phone. It was the same story he had given me to read about a month ago. I looked it over again, reading through the scribbling.

In it, this father is so wrapped up in the projects he designs for an aerospace firm that he doesn't have any time for his family, even when he's home. His kids are always trying to tell him things, but he's either working on something, or reading the paper. The children act like they're puppies jumping up to be petted or played with. Every once in a while the father glances up and notices, acknowledges whoever's trying to talk to him, and then goes back to what he's doing. The mother keeps coming in and getting frustrated because her husband won't talk. She keeps saying, "Why do I *waste* my breath?" as if the kids have the answer. Oh, and also, there's this radio playing all through the story.

It was basically autobiography, except for the aerospace thing, and the radio playing. Tom never gave up on my father, always knew if he bugged him enough he could get him to put down his pencil, take off his glasses, rub his eyes and say, "What?"

I, on the other hand, took the tack of acting indifferent, thinking Dad would eventually notice my cold demeanor and ask me what was up. It never did have much of an impact.

Anyway, Tommy had given me this story to read, and then asked me out to lunch. He didn't say a word about it until lunch was almost over, and we were waiting for the check. Then, he sat across from me with this expectant look on his face, and he said, "So? What'd you think?"

"About . . . "

"About my story."

"Tom, I don't know the first thing about reading stories, you know . . . "

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"I know, but just tell me, like, what was your impression, the thing you noticed most."

"Well, uh . . . the radio. I guess I was thinking, you can't hear yourself think in this story. The damn radio's always on."

"Ok, yeah, did you like that, did you get that part of it?"

"Tom, I know there's something you want me to say, and I don't think I'm saying it."

"Just, did you like it?" He seemed annoyed.

"Yeah, I guess I did, all except for the radio."

The check came then, and we both had to get back to work. Tom seemed like he was in a hurry.

My watch beeped, and I went downstairs to the laundry room and slogged my brother's wet clothes into the dryer. He should have shown the story to Annie, I thought, lifting a heavy lump of wet towels and placing them in the drum of the dryer. She would have understood it. I could have listened to her talk to him about it; she would have pointed a finger toward a particularly clever line. She would have said the right things. Maybe I'd have learned something. But he didn't show it to Annie. There was something he wanted only from me.

When I came back up I smelled that strange combination of odors again. It was time to get at the grunge. I let out the putrid grey water in the sink and did the dishes. I'd tried to avoid dealing with the cat box, but the smell was getting to me. I held my breath and emptied the litter into a Hefty bag. Then I opened the lid to the kitchen garbage and an even sharper smell hit me full in the face. Everything that might have once been in the refrigerator or pantry was now in that trash can: half-eaten cheeses, wet cereal, rotting fruits with a bite out of each, ripped packages of cookies, pastries, lunch meat. I combined the two messes and held the bag at arm's length as I walked out into the hall, where I thought I had seen a chute. The door clicked behind me. I had a moment of panic thinking I had left the keys inside, and then a moment of hope that I had. I felt in my pocket and they were there.

When I came back in I washed my hands and hoped that Tom hadn't also discarded the coffee, because I was going to be there a while. When I opened the cabinet that held the cups, I noticed a sheet of paper attached to the inside of the cupboard door. It was a typed letter.

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Dear Mr. Brudlaker:

I wish to inform you that you are a toady. Your superiors think so as well; however, they do not mind having a toady beneath them so much as I mind having a toady for a boss.

Your actions within the office have endeared you to no one, motivated as said actions are for political expediency over genuine efficiency or quality of work. While those under you rot with boredom and frustration, alternately bemused and distressed at your illogical and unpredictable decisions, absurdly misdirected goals, and transparently sycophantic maneuvers, you remain oblivious to your own position as the most disposable member of this firm.

Please be hereby informed, therefore, that despite your fascination with your own ability to posture (unrivaled by any corporate contortionist), you have no hope of promotion, either now or in the future. Furthermore, those over whom you now exercise your random tyranny (your intellectual seniors to a man) shall, before long, out-earn you as much as they now outclass you. You may do with this information what you wish; however, I strongly recommend that you seek employment elsewhere, posthaste.

Yours very truly,
Thomas H. Cameron

I laughed. It occurred to me, as I reached for a cup, that this letter, signed with a flourish, and positioned where it was, must have served as Tommy's own strange little pep talk every day when he fixed his morning coffee. The letter answered a question I had never asked of him, but had often wondered: How does someone get out of bed for a job like that?

I looked more closely now at Tom's notes to himself, which were stuck here and there on the wall, mixed in with the flyers for movies, plays, and readings. Half-covered by a notice for a long-past book signing was another letter, this one formally addressed at the top to one Mary Lester-Mauglon:

Dear Ms. Lester-Mauglon,

Please accept this missive from the unworthy simpleton in your writing class whose craft pales in comparison to your own. I know there is no possibility that you would ever look my way, or bestow upon me your coveted approval, but tonight during the critique of my story, I seemed to harvest the quality of attention you have stingily withheld from others. Your insightful comment—How did you put it? Ah, yes—"Shallow, sexist, not worth reading," was spoken with eloquence unrivaled. As to the sexism in my piece: it was unintentional. I will review, and where warranted, mend my ways. Mightn't the depth, however, be found in the eye of the beholder? Narcissus, too,

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saw only what was on the surface. As for the worthiness of my writing for thine eyes, only you can judge, oh Solomon, oh high priestess, oh arbiter of worth. Who could doubt your word? The scent of bacon-grease and VO-5, which follows you in waves, O wise one, flavors the air of absolute unquestionability you so heavily carry.

It stopped there. The guy could make you laugh. But even as I chuckled, I thought, Tommy, you have got to lighten up.

There was a more serious note by his desk, begun and then apparently abandoned, though he had still managed to tape it to the wall. "Dear Arthur," it read,

I'm sorry to say I'm going to have to withdraw from your class, at least for now. I have too much on my mind, too much to sort out—There used to be a space where I could have my voice heard, but I feel I've hit some sort of impenetrable wall—

I know you say to use this kind of thing, channel it creatively, but somehow it's just getting in my way, keeping me from putting anything on paper that isn't nasty and spiteful and full of

That was it.

As I walked downstairs again to get Tom's laundry out of the dryer, I felt an incredible sense of fatigue. There was a pay phone in the laundry room, and I fished around in my pockets for some change. I had used the last of my quarters in the dryer, but I found three dimes. I held the receiver in the crook of my neck as I folded. A friendly voice said hello.

"Hi," I said.

"Are you still over at Tom's?" Annie said.

"Um-hm." I was surprised she hadn't called me. It was getting kind of late.

"And how is it?"

"Weird," I said. "Tell me about your day."

She was used to receiving the kind of answers I was able to give. She knew what I needed.

"Well, Mrs. Court came in today, to discuss Amber's pinching problem . . . "

Annie went on—about Mrs. Court, and the principal, about grading the tests and about little Peter Popielaski, the sad-sack child she had taken under her wing. He had finally scored an A. It wasn't so much that Annie liked the sound of her own voice—she just knew I liked it.

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"So, about Tom," she said finally. "The hospital called. He started wandering the halls tonight," she said, "as soon as it got dark. He was peeking in and watching other patients sleep. They've restricted him to his room."

I looked at my watch. It was already 10:15. I tied a pair of sweat socks in a knot.

"Has he said anything?"

"No, baby."

There was silence on the phone.

"You coming home soon?" she said.

"I was thinking maybe I'd spend the night."

"At Tommy's?"

I hadn't known I was going to say that before it came out of my mouth. It wasn't strictly logical, but whatever I needed to know was going to be at this address, if it was anywhere.

"OK, I guess," she said, and then there was a pause. "How about if I call you there later?" she said.

"Yeah, that'd be good," I said, and we hung up.

I went back upstairs, not really paying attention, and almost tripped on the steps. I managed to hang onto the warm, clean shirts and socks I held. I fished for the key and opened the door. The place didn't smell bad anymore.

I stopped doing chores at some point, and began just poking around—looking in closets, sampling Tom's dusty bottle of after-shave, reading more of the tidbits he had left lying or hanging around. I fingered a piece of paper taped to the lampshade in the bedroom. It looked like a list of names for future characters: Delbert Harmonger, Leticia Salamandar, Hoary Frost.

I was getting hungry, but, of course, Tommy had recently cleaned out the cupboards, hadn't he? I wondered what it was about that food that had so offended him. I stared at the empty shelves of his pantry. Hidden at the back, in a lonely corner, was a plastic jar of peanut butter. I reached for it and opened it. The smell instantly brought back the grade-school lunchroom, brown bags, and notes folded up into little paper footballs, flying between the fifth-grade table and the fourth, my brother to me.

I sat on the couch, and ate spoonfuls of the stuff until I felt vaguely sick to my stomach. It was getting on toward bedtime, and my eyes began to droop as I sat there with the open jar of peanut

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butter on my lap. I wasn't sure why I was there, but the more I tried to concentrate on some rational explanation, the sleepier I felt.

That's one thing I can do, sleep. I know Tommy was having trouble with that before all this happened. I'd have to remember to tell that to Dr. Landis. I had just assumed he was feeling pressured at work. But he started to call me at the office every day, just to talk. About not being able to sleep, about not being able to write, about having quit his class.

I was surprised he'd quit, but I shouldn't have been. Tom's always been that way—everything is all or nothing. So he could be either an inspired artist, or just a number checker, but not both. Same with exercise. He used to be a total fanatic about running—even ran a marathon—and when he quit: couch potato. And now it was talking. All my life I had joked that Tommy was the Tower of Babel, and suddenly he had become the Sphinx.

But the sleeplessness, that was different. Tom had said he couldn't get to sleep until about half an hour before his alarm was supposed to ring, and this had been going on for days. He called me late one night at the office just to tell me this. It was about eleven o'clock, and I was working on some drawings that had to be done by the next morning. I was almost done, I was hungry and I was tired and I was aching to get home.

"Annie told me you were at work," he said.

"Yeah," I said. "I'm working against a deadline here. Tommy, can I call you tomorrow?"

"Wait, wait, Dave, I just want to tell you something, real quick. You know that book about insomnia you gave me? I've been reading it, trying to make myself sleepy, but the more I read, the less I can sleep! Isn't that ironic?"

I was drawing as I spoke to him. I wasn't really concentrating on what he was saying.

"Uh-huh," I said.

Then there was a long pause.

"And how's by you?" he said, finally. I didn't get it then. I didn't hear anything in his voice. He caught me at a bad moment.

"Huh?" I said. "Um, listen, Tom, how about counting sheep or something? Or better yet, stay up late working on a project, that's what I do." I laughed. I meant it as a joke. It was a stupid joke.

"Count sheep," he said, as if he were mulling over the concept. "Count sheep," he said again, and I could hear in his voice that

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old arch tone that he used to use with his Clove buddies. "Great suggestion, Dave, I'll get right on that," he said. And that was the end of our conversation. It was that night, after getting home and pouring myself into bed—just after I'd fallen asleep, when I got the call. St. Mark's calling. *Turn left at the loony bin.*

Tom's couch was uncomfortable for sleeping. I stumbled into his bedroom and scrounged in the bureau for something that would pass for pajamas. My brother's bed was soft, and I began to doze off.

In the grey darkness I heard footsteps, and thought, as if I were sleeping in our old house, *Tom's back.* I sat up, alarmed, until I realized the sounds were resonating through the floor of the apartment above. I lay back down. The pipes groaned as the same neighbors flushed their toilet. I couldn't hear any voices, but what I could hear were the sounds a building holds in the space between its inner walls. Poor design, I thought. As I rested there, I began to lay out the anatomy of the building. Given its age, it was probably full of structural flaws. Noisy wood-joist floors, no sound insulation. I redrew the building in my mind, correcting mistakes in the original design. Of course, when it was built, there would not have been any of the same codes I had to design for. My buildings all had to be earthquake- and tornado-proof, as if at any moment the structure could be barraged from above or below. On my imaginary black-lines, I drew in everything Tom's building would need to guard it from natural disasters. I made each apartment soundproof, scribbled in energy-saving sealed windows, and scratched out that damn cornice that stuck out from the building's top edge—ridiculous, unnecessary, gaudy decoration. If that cornice hadn't been there, Tommy wouldn't have had anything to climb out on, nothing to dangle his feet from. On second thought, maybe it was a good thing it was there. I don't know, though. Something told me that, despite what the rescue team or the crisis people or the doctor might have thought, Tommy did not go up on that roof to jump.

There was a dripping faucet somewhere in the apartment. If I had been at home, I would have gotten up, gotten my tools, and fixed it, no matter what time it was. But here I let it drip. I just lay there and listened to it until I noticed that it stopped, and I heard another sound, a strange, organic sound like someone smacking his lips. I got up cautiously, and followed the sound toward the

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bathroom. The door was half-closed, and without opening it any wider, I peeked in. Perched precariously on the sink, desperately lapping each drop from the faucet before it fell, was the cat. And I had wondered how it had survived.

I flipped on the bathroom light and pushed the door open, and it banged against something hard. I looked around the door and saw the phone lying on the floor, the cordless phone, with it's battery light blinking. It had been here all the time. Had been here, of course, since Tommy had used it last. That night when he hadn't switched it off, hadn't hung up, had simply dropped it on the floor. What did Landis say? He had called the crisis center, screaming "I need talk-back!" whatever the hell that meant, and then he had dropped the phone, here. I stepped in, pulled the door back and shut it behind me. I sat down on the bathroom floor, and I did what my brother had failed to do. I switched the phone off.

When Tommy sat here last, what might have been going through his mind? I looked up, and saw, in the full-length mirror on the back of the bathroom door, the reflection of a guy dressed in my brother's pajamas, sitting cross-legged on the floor, dishevveled and maybe even confused, though the face was blocked out by a letter-sized note stuck into the frame of the mirror. This letter, unlike the others, was full of mistakes, as if it had been hurriedly typed. I read the first line. "Dear dave," it said.

Dear dave,
I just got off the phone withi you and i just thought that you should know a few things that I'm thinking because I dont' think you hear me when I talk, so even if I said these things to you, they just woulnd't . . . I know that you put me on your speaker phone when I call lately I know you're a busy person, but dammit, couldn't you just hold the phone to your ear? The yes, tommy, no tommy, mm-hm tommy's I hear would at least sound a lot more personal. I'm sorry I call you at work, Dave, but see, you're the only person who might evern come
close to understanding me . I have to know that you're listening . . . it's just that I haven't, well, not being able to sleep makes it hard for me to think.
I call you at work because at least while I am talking with you I can think alittle bit straighter, like when you and I used to talk and stare at the ceiling, life just seemed to make sense

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when we could talk about it then, when all the rest of the house
was quiet and I could hear myself, I could hear you talking. Did
you know you talked in your sleep sometimes? Not very often,
but every once in a while. I never told you
that because I knew that it would make you paranoid, but
those times you talked, if I was awake, I'd listen, I'd listen to whatever
you said, most of it didn't make sense, but then maybe you think
I don't make any sense, maybe I'm not making any sense now,
it just seems sometimes like I'm wound up so tight, like I've
got to talk to you, to hear you talk back,
or something is going to happen, but you don't want to hear
that, I can hear you now, "Tommy, don't be that way, take
it easy, lighten up.' David, what exactly does
that mean? Do you know? Or is that just something like MMm-hmm.
Yeah tom. Yeah tom, shut up tom, I hear you, I hear you,
but really you do not.

The cat jumped down from the sink and meowed at me as if it were hungry, but I didn't move. It came right up behind me, pushing its head against my back. I pushed it away, and it began to wail. I'd fed it. I'd given it water, though it seemed to prefer a more difficult way to drink. I had even cleaned out its reeking cat box. "What do you want?" I said out loud. I got up, trying to escape its insistence, trying to get some peace, trying to think about things. It followed me around the apartment, relentlessly pursuing me with its high-pitched cry. "What do you want?" I shouted.

I picked the thing up and set it outside the apartment door, hoping then I could tune it out, but its cries became more insistent, more infuriating. I went out into the hall, picked it up roughly, held it up away from me, and looked it in the face. It started to purr. I stood there for a moment like an idiot, and then pulled the thing close to my chest and felt the vibration of the sound.

When I turned to go back in I felt for the keys and realized that this time, I had none. Shit. It was the middle of the night, I was locked out of an apartment that was not mine, and I looked like a hobo. I had on Tom's ugliest pajama bottoms, a ratty old T-shirt and a pair of slippers Annie and I had given him for Christmas, which he obviously never wore. I sat on the floor and leaned up against the locked door. The cat curled up next to me and

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purred. Dammit, Tom. Why did you drop that fucking phone? Where did you think you were going?

The cat looked up at me as if I were its best friend. I scooped it up in one hand. "Come on," I said, "we're taking a climb. We're going to see what was so damn attractive about the roof." I went toward the exit sign and started up the stairs. At about the third landing I began to feel winded, and at the fourth I began to sweat. At seven I could smell my own perspiration. "I'm listening now, Tommy. I'm listening!" I said, not caring who heard. The cat was hanging on around my neck for dear life as I went faster up the stairs. His claws dug into my shoulder, and his fur stuck to the sweat on my neck.

I passed fourteen and came out onto the roof. As the cool air hit me I felt a sudden relief, and I stopped for a moment. Morning was just barely starting to lighten one corner of the sky, and a breeze blanketed any sounds that might have risen from the street. I surveyed the gray roof, and walked straight ahead, toward that damn useless cornice my brother had so cleverly found a use for. Just in front of me, it rose up to meet the edge of the roof. Just here, it was big enough to sit on. I looked down, and for a moment I felt dizzy.

The cat and I climbed out onto the cornice. We sat and dangled our feet for a long time, just listening to nothing. The breeze blew. It was like sitting at the edge of a canyon. But if I had called out just then there would have been no echo. My voice would have been lost in the quiet. Had Tom called out, hoping to hear an echo? *Talk-back*, he said he wanted. Had he been asking me for something I was unwilling to give? All these years, I'd been so carefully insulating myself from disappointment that I'd never considered my own ability to disappoint.

Since we were kids in matching T-shirts, echoing each other in looks if not in temperament, I'd heard Tommy's voice whenever I wanted, and I'd switched him on and off at will. Now we were suddenly separated by the absence of his speech, a loss I never knew could be so great. What had come between us was like the quiet space between walls—we were on opposite sides of that space, soundproofed from each other. I wished I could design a place where there was nothing between us, where Tommy would know his voice was heard, where I could listen, absorb the sound,

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and talk back. A place where he could know he wasn't wasting his breath.

I looked like a bum, and I was cradling a skinny, flea-bitten cat, but I managed to convince the cabby I was just locked out. He must have seen worse-looking fares, because he took me. When we reached St. Mark's, I asked the driver for a pencil and a blank receipt, and wrote him out a grubby I.O.U. with my name and number. He looked at it, then looked at me. I'm sure he thought I was an inmate returning home.

I hid the cat under my arm as I walked past the desk, and I got to Tom's room without questioning. I guess they knew me. Or maybe I really did blend in. Tom was strapped to his bed, and his roommate had been removed. Annie had told me about this, but hell, I hadn't seen him strapped. I gently shut the door, and set the cat on a vinyl chair, where it curled up and got comfortable. I loosened Tom's restraints. The buckles clinked as they hit the floor. I stared at my brother. He looked wan. He wasn't getting better.

I lay down on the other bed in the room, and put my filthy, street-sullied slippers on the new sterile sheets. What was I doing here? Nothing I could do was going to make any difference. I lay there until my breathing slowed, and I began to think more random thoughts. Maybe I was falling asleep. They could open the door and find me here, another loony asleep in bed, ready to be strapped in, ready to give up. I opened my eyes and stared at the ceiling.

"You know what the thing about it was, Dave? Up there on the roof?"

I heard his voice, and it was just as though he were continuing a conversation he had started not a minute before.

"What, Tom?" I said, automatically. But I looked over at him, looked away from the ceiling and looked at my brother, like I can't ever remember doing. He stared up.

"The thing about it was . . . " He waited so long that for a moment I feared I might never hear him finish, might never again hear the sweet sound of my brother's voice. "The thing about it was . . . It was so quiet." He stopped, and I didn't answer. He turned his head to look at me, to see if I was listening.

"I know," I said. "I know."

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NICOLE GRAEV

Tight Jeans

In 1982, I begged my mother for a pair of jeans. I was six then, and my baggy corduroy overalls would simply no longer do. I put my foot down. I wanted jeans—real jeans—the kind of jeans the big girls wore who hung around outside the mini-mart: close-fitting, low-riding, ass-hugging, dark blue jeans.

What sparked this fixation? Up until the summer of that year, I had never much cared what clothes were put on my body. Sweat suits, snowsuits—whatever my mother selected, as long as it was comfortable, was fine with me. But now I was obsessed. I would drive with her to the mini-mart to pick up a gallon of milk or a carton of eggs, and as we pulled out of the lot, I would lean over the back seat of the station wagon and ogle the girls in jeans who smoked cigarettes and giggled at remarks made by large looking boys. I would peer hypnotically through the rear window at the girls in jeans as we drove away down the street. By the time we turned the corner at the intersection, their faces would be nothing but blurry masses; but the jeans, with their rigid form and firm contours, leaning boldly against the stucco wall of the mini-mart as if they stood on their own, were, in all their dark blue splendor, as clear and magnificent as ever. They were unmistakable. That's what I'd be, I thought to myself, if ever I could squeeze into my very own pair of tight, dark jeans—bold, glorious, unmistakable.

We lived that summer in a neighborhood full of children. For me and my brother Adam, who was nine at the time, it was a perpetual playland. Our backyard was connected on one side to the Corvolos' backyard and to the Goldmans' on the other; the Nelsons lived across the street, and the Clarks were only four houses down. With all the kids and roaming space these families had between them, the playing options seemed endless. Our world was several backyards wide; it was free and varied and sprawling, and every corner of it was ours to share. At least for the

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first part of the summer. Then Robby Corvolo got the idea about the clubhouse. Robby was the oldest of the Corvolo boys, and the staggering ten years he had under his belt, combined with the fact that he owned a dirt bike, put him in a well-deserved position of authority. The clubhouse he wanted to build was going to be the best clubhouse ever; it was going to be bigger than any of our bedrooms, with a real door that had real hinges; it was going to have a roof so it could be used in the rain; it was going to have three coats of paint finished with shellac. And, best and most important of all, it was going to be for boys only. No girls allowed.

To my horror and the boys' delight, the thing went up—with the help of Jerome Clark's uncle who dabbled in carpentry. It was creatively named The No Girls Clubhouse and across it blazed a huge sign in red letters that said exactly that: "The No Girls Clubhouse." That sign hissed and sizzled on me like a brand; it was red and heavy and hot, and I shriveled as it sneered at me and jabbed me away. It was the first formal barrier I had encountered, and I, for a reason that I could not help, was on the wrong side of it. For the first time that I can remember, I experienced the smallness of being shoved aside, shut out, disregarded. Time spent with the rest of the ostracized while the boys were inside their impenetrable shelter brought no relief; no matter how much fun I may have had with these girls, I could never forget that I was with them by default—that our strongest bond was our deficiency. In a group comprised solely of girls, I was invisible; they could see me, I knew, but together we were somehow more of an absence than a presence. In retrospect, it seems to me that my sudden jeans obsession was born out of the sensation that clubhouse forced upon me—the feeling of being discounted, subtracted, unseen. When I imagined myself inside the clubhouse—or, more specifically, when I imagined how *the boys* would see me once I was inside the clubhouse—the picture was of me, laughing, chatting, performing a secret handshake, and sporting the perfect pair of tight dark jeans.

It didn't take long for my mother to capitulate. I was merciless in my pleading, and she finally agreed that I was old enough to decide for myself what I wanted to wear. It was at Aunt Suzy's Clothes for Kids, the origin of several items in my wardrobe, that I found them: stiff, boot-leg, skintight, flawless. They even had an added, unexpected touch—two petal pink ribbons delicately

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embroidered onto each back pocket, right where my rear end went. My mother, after eyeing my selection with disapproval, proposed a different pair—one more befitting an active girl my age. They were denim, but a cottony, shapeless denim. They were *dungarees*. They wouldn't work. After much bargaining, I returned home that day with what I knew was more than just a pair of jeans. I returned home with my ticket in.

And it was—sort of—once I had performed my elaborately planned Daisy Duke *coup de main*. Daisy Duke was a character from "The Dukes of Hazard," the cop and high-speed-car-chase show that Adam and I looked forward to watching together every Friday night. Daisy's role on the show was a bit uncertain. She was in some way related to Bo and Luke Duke, the show's stars who fled from the law in a flashy low-rider, and while she didn't really *do* much to contribute to their victories, the Duke brothers liked her pretty well and she somehow managed to exude hero status. While Adam admired the clever plans of Luke Duke, I was enamored with Daisy. She wore jeans like mine, except hers were ruggedly cut off an inch below the crotch; whenever she got enthused or animated, a fleshy arc of buttock would show through the meager denim shreds of her jean shorts. This occurred weekly during the show's opening credits, which featured Daisy forcefully kicking in a car door with one long, lean leg crowned by a spiked heel. While I knew that cutting off the legs of my jeans was not an option for me, I felt that the pink ribbons perched snugly on either side of my butt somehow made up for this. After several practice runs in front of my bedroom mirror, I was ready to make my move.

I can't imagine what I must have looked like—a scrawny six-year-old girl kicking in that clubhouse door with all my strength. I do, however, remember what I *imagined* myself to look like—none other than the beautiful, feisty Daisy Duke—and I had no doubt that that was whom I looked like to the boys. My jean-clad leg flew up, the door came down, and while my intrusion was met with fierce resistance at first, the club's members were taken with my performance; after some official deliberation mediated by Robby Corvolo, I was awarded permission to spend the rest of the afternoon inside the clubhouse. From that point on, I maintained the status not of club member but of "honorary boy," a title I was proud to have.

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As it turned out, the clubhouse wasn't nearly as much fun as I'd expected. While I'd managed to get inside the house physically, I was still under no circumstances to be privy to club secrets. Rituals were performed, code words buzzed in the air, but none of these meant anything to me. Still, it felt good to be there with them—to be large again, and seen. At the same time, I could never really pinpoint why it was that I, of all the girls in our neighborhood, merited the title "honorary boy." While I couldn't resist reminding the others of my important position, I was haunted constantly by a vague sense of guilt—as if I had accepted a prize I didn't deserve. I could understand why the privilege wouldn't be conferred on someone like Rachel Clark, who, with her frilly dresses and hair trimmings, was a boy's nightmare. But what about Katie Nelson? She had always been more interested in doing boy stuff than the rest of us; she could play a mean game of freeze tag, and her skill at climbing trees was unsurpassable. I excelled at none of these things. Why would the boys rather have me around than her? I could think of nothing I possessed that Katie didn't—except, of course, the perfect pair of jeans. Could that really be it? Even at the time, it seemed implausible to me. Nevertheless, it was with those jeans that I associated my power. I vowed to myself that I would wear them every day; I swore that I would never take them off.

What did those jeans mean? Looking back now, I believe they marked my entrance into a position I'd find myself squeezed in for years to come. Filling those jeans, I wedged myself into a narrow breech—the slim gap between the Rachel Clarks and the Katie Nelsons of the world. While Rachel was forced to remain outside the mystical male world of the clubhouse because she, in all her girlish trimmings, so conspicuously didn't fit in, Katie was denied entrance, it occurs to me now, because she so obviously did. The tomboy was competition, the priss was the enemy, and I, in my rough and hardy jeans tenderly embroidered with little pink ribbons, was neither.

What was I then? I was something in the middle—saucy and brash, but not so uppity that I didn't know how to smile and sit quietly while the boys performed their puzzling ceremonies. I was a figment of the imagination. Creative credit belongs in part to the originators of Daisy Duke and other early eighties female

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fictions like her, but, in the end, the imagination that I was really born from was my own. That summer, haunted by a feeling of absence, I stepped out of my body and imagined what I would look like through an approving pair of male eyes. Then I simply became the thing I saw. It's ironic, really; only by turning myself into the imaginary could I finally feel like a perceptible reality.

What I did that summer when I viewed myself through a male gaze was not an act specific to the time or place in which I grew up. At the turn of the century, almost a hundred years before my jeans were in fashion, Virginia Woolf was performing similar visual acrobatics in England. In her unfinished memoir "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf describes how she, after dressing for a society gathering, would present herself for inspection before her half-brother George Duckworth, a man who adhered unquestioningly to Victorian social codes:

> He at once fixed on me that extraordinarily observant scrutiny with which he always inspected our clothes. He looked me up and down for a moment as if I were a horse brought into the show ring. Then the sullen look came into his eyes; the look which expressed not simply aesthetic disapproval; but something that went deeper. It was the look of moral, of social, disapproval. . . . I knew myself condemned from more points of view than I could analyse. As I stood there I was conscious of fear; of shame; of something like anguish—a feeling, like so many, out of all proportion to its surface cause.

George's critical gaze was not enough in itself to fill Woolf with the "anguish" she describes. The look of disapproval that came into his eyes was perhaps powerful enough to instill fear in her, but shame derives from self-condemnation. As Woolf never honored the Victorian social code as fervently as George, it is unlikely that she would so fervently censure herself for breaking it; shame is a sensation she could only have arrived at by stepping outside herself and judging herself from George's standpoint. And George's eye was not simply the eye of one man; it was stronger than that. George, as the product and embodiment of patriarchal Victorian England, gazed with the strength of a culture; when Woolf adopted his point of view, she condemned herself with the force of an entire society.

Across the Atlantic, a half century later, patriarchal America of the 1950s gazed at its women with this same patriarchal scrutiny,

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and its women were conditioned at a young age to scrutinize themselves right along with it. Two years ago, I wrote an essay analyzing the voice with which teen magazines of the fifties addressed their female audience, focusing specifically on the drivel in advice columns. In *Seventeen*'s column of February 1956, one girl complained that the boys she went to school with seemed to like her but, for a reason she couldn't figure out, did not want to date her. "My problem," she explained, "is that boys don't take me seriously. . . . They tell me their girl troubles, and I help them out. They always say they're too shy to tell anyone else. . . . I'm popular in everything—except dating." The editors' response to this reader was as follows:

> Perhaps the reason you are not being asked on dates can be found by turning a powerful searchlight on yourself. Don't you secretly like being asked for advice because it gives you a feeling of superiority? In a dating situation, it's the boy who likes to feel stronger, since the world will expect him to act this way later on, as husband and breadwinner. Our advice to you is to refuse gently but firmly to manage any boy's problems for him. Instead, ask him to help *you* with something.

The young girl here is assessed through a male gaze; she is spoken to in a voice derived from this gaze; and to help her better understand her egregious blunder, she is advised to step outside of herself and inspect herself through this gaze—with the aid of a high-beam light.

Almost a quarter of a century after this advice was given, I was born. With the help of Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem and the radical feminists of the sixties and early seventies, who had the guts to turn that powerful searchlight away from themselves and onto the world around them, America had undergone a revolution by that time. My female cohorts and I have grown up in an era of liberty and enlightenment. Women can be strong; we can speak our minds without worrying what men think of us; we can listen to our own voices; we can be our own breadwinners; after the long hard struggle, we are finally free from the chains that bind us; at long last, we can be *ourselves.*

Or can we? The last I checked, *Seventeen* was still on the newsstands—right next to *Sassy* and *YM* and a smattering of other newer competitors in the teen magazine market. I know this

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because I still receive subscription renewal notices from each of these publications. I will not dispute that their contents have altered significantly since the 1950s; sex is discussed in explicit detail, slim pantsuits have replaced poodle skirts in the fashion layouts, and advice columns now offer perfect answers to stumping job interview questions. The modest, passive feminine ideal of the 1950s may, in many ways, be gone, but the voice that dictated it is not; it has simply made some changes in its demands. This voice, as it did in the 1950s, speaks from a male viewpoint. The world may change for women, and male taste and expectations may change with it, but that gaze is never diverted for a second. It is willful and tenacious. When *Sassy* encourages its readers to be their bold, clever, with-it, modern selves—when it, in short, encourages them to be "sassy"—it is usually in the context of how to land a date for the prom. This voice does not tell us to be ourselves; it tells us to be independent and savvy and smart because that's the way men like us—at least for now.

I hear this voice, and I know that the female goddess of my time resides in that chink between tomboy and priss—a lusty Athena tied up in a pink ribbon. That dreaded sensation of absence that I felt outside The No Girls Clubhouse compels me, more often than I would like to admit, to listen to it. I hammer myself into the chink. I am Farah Fawcett on "Charlie's Angels"; I plow through obstacles, outwit the world, and wave around a loaded gun, but mostly because some faceless male voice has so instructed me through a booming intercom, and mostly because I know that I'll be complimented on my performance after I'm done. I watch myself through Charlie's eyes, and I judge myself according to what I see. If I am not pleased with this, I modify my performance, because people look at what they like to see, and I know from experience that I never want to be unseen. I drive myself deeper into the chink, knowing that the tighter I'm lodged, the closer I am to standing atop the goddess's pedestal—way up high where no one's eyes can escape me.

The elements of my performance have been determined not only from such cultural distances, but also by a specific pair of male eyes and a voice that I heard in my own home. As most children do growing up, I always fit into a particular, clearly-delineated slot in my family. This slot, I believe, was shaped mostly

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by my father's point of view. "You're too smart for a kid your age," he would declare affectionately when I protested something he said. "It makes it hard for me to pretend I know better than you." The rest of my family would laugh and nod in agreement, and so it was decided; I was the smart kid, the staunchly autonomous one, a "tough cookie." But if my father determined my role, he also led me to take pride in it. If I truly possessed the traits he associated me with, then I must be someone like him, and I wanted nothing more than to be like him. With young eyes, I saw my father hovering above me crowned in a halo of brain waves and strapped with wings of self-sufficiency, and I worshipped him for it. Quality time for us was time spent tossing ideas back and forth like a baseball, and nothing felt better than impressing him with an idea. I would know when that had happened by the way he would look at me just a little, for just a second, with just the hint of a smile; that look would touch me like the tap of a magic wand. It would make me believe that, at least for that moment, he saw me the way I saw him—winged, crowned, poised in the air. I suppose my father's were the first male eyes I ever looked at myself through, and I liked what I saw through them. So much, in fact, that I have since tried to see it again and again, to re-create that magical image, to make it a part of what I see each time I step outside myself and examine myself from a male perspective.

I suppose this could be called "putting my best foot forward." But this phrase has definite positive connotations; it says "you see something in yourself of which you are proud, so you are going right ahead and showing it to the world." But there is a distinct difference between "putting your best foot forward" and turning yourself into a vision. When a woman turns herself into a vision, she puts less energy into *being* and more energy into *showing*; she puts her strengths and talents on display instead of putting them to use; she empties out all the good things from inside of her and pastes them like emblems onto her skin; she becomes a sign of herself, an empty shell. A woman who turns herself into a vision can recognize her positive qualities only as much as these are recognized by her viewer; she depends on the male look to buoy her up, and if she discovers that she is not being seen the way she wants to be seen, she plummets to the ground, crashing like Icarus in a blazing pile of feathers.

In her memoir, Virginia Woolf describes how being the object

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of George Duckworth's patriarchal scrutiny forced a split in her identity. In the drawing room, the young Woolf was both active and detached, simultaneously performing and critically observing those "acts" expected of her by her half-brother. This split gave her attitude to George a "queer twist"; ". . . Even while I obeyed," she explains, "I marvelled—how could anyone believe what George believed? There was a spectator in me who, even while I squirmed and obeyed, remained observant." My own sense of being under the male gaze has similarly endowed me with a dual consciousness. But I believe the age I live in has torn me asunder in a way that Woolf never was; an additional feminist gaze—which nowadays has a cultural force as powerful in many ways as patriarchal scrutiny—severs me yet again, creating a third contender in the battle over my identity.

As much as feminist expectations of women have been co-opted by popular culture to reinvent the female goddess, those expectations still exist unadulterated. I know what they are, and I can look at myself from a feminist perspective and judge myself according to how well I fulfill them. When, from this perspective, I am confronted with a woman who depends on male eyes to make her feel good about herself, I know I have a long way to go. I keep a feminist gaze upon myself and monitor my progress. But still, I cannot fully shake that temptation to see myself as an object of male vision; the two opposing gazes come into conflict and, once again, I find myself wedged in a chink. To please both male and feminist viewer, I must walk a tightrope between two extremes, and this rope is a fine one. I try to keep balanced upon it, but to do so, I must hold myself back, because I know there are things about it that could throw me off in an instant, sending me toppling to either side. I too often lose myself in this run-in between gazes; the conflicting sides battle it out, while I am left sitting out on the bench. Then, I'm a third wheel; I've lapsed into the third person; I've become "she."

When I was younger, my mother would tell me how fortunate I was to be part of my generation. "It was different for us," she would say. "No one expected us to be anything but a good wife and mother. You can be those things, if you choose, and anything else you decide you want to be." Her words would give me the strangest feeling—an unsettling blend of sadness and excitement.

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I sensed that there was a void in both of us, but that hers was a hopeless, barred-off void—a vacuum that had never been, and now could never be, filled. The vacancy inside of me was an open, inviting space—empty, but on the verge of being filled, braced to receive anything I chose to seize and stuff into it.

But packing that space full has not been as simple as I anticipated. Filling it requires forceful movement, rapid action, daredevil decision-making, and it's no easy thing to move forcefully, act rapidly or make daring decisions when I've wedged myself into a chink or stepped out onto a tightrope wire. When I am aware of the eyes upon me, I am in a state of paralysis, petrified that movement might melt the flattering pose I am frozen in. If I consider the gazes that are fixed on me, I take itsy bitsy steps, dreading the boos of disapproval that will erupt if I fall to the ground. And so, I remain empty. However glorious it feels to be gazed upon with approval, this feeling cannot make up for the horrible sensation of going unsatiated. I want to fill that space, and I want to fill it with the best stuff in the world.

And so I make a pact with myself that I will ease up on the pressure I put on her; I will stave it off from both sides; I will loosen her belt and let her out of her jeans; I will put down my hammer and chisel; from this moment on, I will no longer survey her from a distance. I close my eyes and plow forward blindly; I take giant steps; I tread a swerving path; I charge and graze with every stride; I pack myself full. You might not want to look at me, but you will know I'm there when I knock you over. If you want to stare, that's fine with me. I have no reason to go unseen.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

The Old Woman Regretting the Time of Her Youth, or Lament of the Beautiful Helmet Maker

I thought I heard an old woman,
The beautiful Helmet Maker,
Grieving for her youth that's gone,
Speaking of it in this manner:
"Ha! Felonious age, destroyer,
Why did you beat me down this way?
Who's to stop me suffering further,
Ending it with a stroke today?

The power I held over men
You took, my beauty at its height.
Clerks, leading merchants, clergymen,
Would have given all for a night
With such beauty, though they might
Regret it later. And would today
If they saw me as I am, a sight
To make a beggar turn away.

Many a man I would refuse—
It wasn't quite so bright of me—
For a smart boy whom I chose,
Fed well, and dressed in finery.
I cheated on him but, believe me,
I loved him, though he drove me mad.
He knocked me around a bit roughly,
And loved me only for what I had.

He could drag me through the mud,
Tread on me . . . I loved him more.

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Had he maimed me, I still would.
When he told me to kiss him, the sore
Ribs and curses went out the door.
The glutton, full of wickedness,
Embraced me. And a lot of good
That's done me. Shame and sinfulness.

It's thirty years that he's been dead,
And I remain with my gray hair.
When I think of the times I had,
And what I am now! When I stare
At my naked body, and compare
Its dried up, shriveled ugliness
With what it used to be, I swear
I'm filled with such great bitterness!

Where has the smooth forehead gone,
Blond hair, arched eyebrows, wide-spaced eyes,
The playful look that nets the pigeon
However timorous he is, or wise
He thinks he is? To itemize:
A straight nose, neither big nor small,
The ears too, just the perfect size,
And crimson lips, to cap it all.

Pretty shoulders, long and slender
Arms; beautiful hands and wrists,
That my fate seemed to intend for
Heated tourneys in the lists
Of passion . . . small, tilting breasts,
Rounded thighs, wide loins, and then
The vulva in its little nest
In the middle of the garden.

Wrinkled forehead and gray hair,
Sunken eyebrows, and the eyes
Whose laughter drove men to despair,
Clouding . . . again to itemize.
The nose that was a perfect size,

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Hooked. Two hairy ears hang down.
You'd have to look hard to realize
This death's-head is a face you've known.

The end of beauty isn't good:
Shoulders pulled into a hump,
Arms short, fingers stiff as wood.
The breasts? Shrunk, scarcely a bump.
The same goes for the hips and rump.
The vulva? Ugh! The rounded thigh is
A thigh no more, a shriveled stump
Covered with spots, like sausages.

So now here on our heels we squat,
Each miserable poor old fool,
Talking among ourselves of what
We had, when life was wonderful.
Women are like balls of wool
Close to a fire. Soon set aflame,
And soon burned out. All beautiful
Women like us would say the same."

Ballade
The Beautiful Helmet Maker to the Daughters of Joy

"Beautiful Glove Girl, consider.
Blanche the Shoemaker, black or tan,
It's time to think what the future
Holds for both of you. Spare no man!
Grab all the money that you can,
To right and left. Now! Don't wait!
Old women have no more value than
A coin that doesn't circulate.

Sausage Seller, graceful dancer,

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And Guillemette for Tapestry,
Don't give your boss a back answer.
Without the shop where'll you be?
With some old priest. All you'll see
For wages—and he'll hate to pay it,
The Lord's work should be done for free—
A coin that doesn't circulate.

You, Bonnet Maker, bonny Jean,
Don't let your boy friend pin you down.
Don't be so choosy, Catherine.
If you want a man all of your own,
Try smiling for a change, don't frown.
A plain girl can always get a date,
But what'll you be when youth has flown?
A coin that doesn't circulate.

Girls, be warned! The reason why
I weep and cry at such a rate,
Is that I'll be like this till I die,
A coin that doesn't circulate."

This was the lesson that she taught
Who once was beautiful and good,
And there it is, well said or not.
I've dictated as well as I could
To Fremin. I hope he understood
And the fool doesn't spoil my work.
He may—his head is made of wood.
People judge the master by the clerk.

[Translations from The Testament *by François Villon]*

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THOMAS M. DISCH

Proverbs

1. There is a man weeping as he sits by a roulette table, in Atlantic City: he has lost everything, he is ruined.

2. Another weeps as, yet again, the mailman drives by without stopping.

3. In a suburb outside Middletown tears of despair moisten a long-unlaundered pillowcase at 3 a.m.

4. These men are fortune's fools who baselessly believed luck would favor them always because they had been lucky once.

5. They shall turn to their comforters and find no comfort. Their dinners are take-out, their wives live in distant cities.

6. I say to them: stop bellyaching. Mow your lawns. Rejoice in the music of Beethoven, and brush your teeth.

7. Behold a procession of women approaches. They are old but their faces are bright with makeup. They do not complain of arthritis or their children's neglect.

8. Here is a widow who paints landscapes and clowns. How chipper she is, how full of wisdom.

9. Here is her sister Judith. Four hours every day she speaks with strangers on the phone about their asphalt driveways, and never repines.

10. This woman's house is spotless. She breakfasts on her own preserves. Her hands are always busy.

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11. How long the days are in July, how much there is still to be done.

12. Do not grieve, therefore, for resorts that stand empty in the Catskills, where once were multitudes; nor for the rivers where no bass strike; nor yet for the small town's only five-and-dime, burned to the ground.

13. What though there is not money for a wider drive: do not, each spring, the irises return?

14. The deer and the crow delight beneath the apple tree; the wise man sits by his TV and drowses, and the mouse is warm in the crawlspace.

15. Why, therefore, sorrow? A millennium draws to an end, but shall not another replace it?

16. Look on this book, a bestseller long ago, and just today purchased for two dollars at the Methodists' Book Bazaar.

17. There is no death but only continuance; if not for those who have passed away, at least for all the rest of us.

18. The nonagenarian in the nursing home has heard the Nightly News, but her sleep is undisturbed.

19. The downsized trucker drinks his fill, and the chronically depressed waitress grows fat.

20. Above them all are the stars, beyond summary or comprehension; beyond all sorrow equally: unthinkable their distance from us.

21. And yet, how wonderful to think, it is those stars, so far away, that are the source of all our luck.

22. Let the wise heed these counsels, and let the ignorant live in their ignorance still. Selah.

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The Song of Songs

1. Do the roots of the rose understand the hungers of the bee? Will its petals, remembering, blush?

2. The virgin violated in her dreams, the dying Diaghilev, the ardent seminarian, the D.I. naked in her tent: Can any understand the madness of desire?

3. In the steam bath of summer, beside winter's hearth, has the flesh any wish but some further warmth?

4. Come, beloved, let our tongues engage. Let them announce our secret names.

5. Here Egypt lies, and all her crocodiles; the Nile, its slime—and Isis smiles.

6. In the brothel of the circus, the haven of the church, who is there who can resist? The hands of the acrobat grasp the ankles of the priest, and they kiss.

7. Someone awaits me in destiny's dark motel. I come, beloved, for I have no choice.

8. As the mantis lavishes his life, as the ocean spends itself upon the cliffs, just so, beloved, so helplessly, this bliss.

9. We two are everywhere we look. We are multiplied. We are sown and reaped.

10. Is there escape in sleep? None; for when we awake, desire awakens with us.

11. Love is a burning fire. We are Ixions, fixed. The spinning never ceases; or, if it stops a little while, there, in the morning, is the Nile.

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12. Rest! rest! But she may not. The sun has grasped her by her wrists. How splendidly she somersaults toward the other aerialist.

13. We are that duo in the air, beloved: all metaphors that ever linked, all elements, all bonds, all broken boundaries.

14. I know you now: you are a goddess. Possess me! caress me: I am Adonis, ready to die at thy decree. Kiss me. Kill me. Set me free.

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DAVID R. SLAVITT

As If

God does not really mean the world literally.
—Robert Musil

"And does the defendant have anything to say?"
As the judge peers down from the bench, the well-read villain
replies he didn't really mean it literally.
His honor, laughing, imposes, nevertheless,
a sentence the malefactor may, if he likes,
consider as metaphoric, those long years
a mere figure of speech, for what is time,
or space, or even, for that matter, matter?
The oncologist's pronouncement, however grave,
is also a semiotic gesture, a mordant
trope from which the patient abstracts himself,
the point of the conversation as likely as not
being the way the sunlight gleams on the doctor's
pen-stand, or how, with the prominent hairs of his eyebrows,
he resembles a huge bug. Flights of fancy?
Or glimpses of God's odd truth? It's a consolation,
Musil's notion that these are rhetorical figures
and the world is an analogue for something else,
an anodyne for the pain that may feel real,
but that God cannot intend in a literal way
unless Musil didn't mean "literally" literally.
Is *The New York Times* in code? In our search for meaning,
for clarity in this muddle, we suppose
the world may be a backdrop, an indication
of something going on elsewhere on the canvas
or beyond the frame where we are unable to see it.
There that tree that is painted falling falls
in the eerie silence philosophers frighten us with.
Does that improve our case or make it worse?

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Never mind meaning; we settle gladly for pattern,
the tensions and resolutions of dance or music's
order of chords. For the reassurance of rhythm,
we invent a god to thank. The faint heartbeats
and the gentle up-and-down of my mother's breathing
as she held me at her breast . . . That's what I want,
literally, but can't ever have again
except by the mind's extension, despair's routine
contrivance, which, God knows, is worth the world.

Two Prophets

A sacred calling, but both are mortals,
fallible, even foolish, and sooner or later
they meet, the two prophets—so Strabo says—
and in what begins in a friendly way,
swap tales, boasting of feats of prognostication:
Mopsus tells his stories for Calchas to match,
and it turns to a competition, each daring
the other.
Calchas points to a nearby fig tree
and asks how many he thinks there are.
In an instant,
"Ten thousand less one," Mopsus answers,
"just enough to fill the hold of the ship
arriving at this moment, I do believe,"
and he points a hand vaguely toward the harbor.

A defiantly odd number. They hire a crew
to pick the tree clean, and sure enough,
9,999
figs, and they fit in the hold of the ship. Just.

Now it's Calchas' turn, and Mopsus asks,
"That sow about to farrow . . . Would you perhaps

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hazard a guess? The number of piglets? Their gender?"
Calchas, who hasn't the vaguest idea, says so,
annoyed, because this shouldn't be a game.
But Mopsus, who isn't playing, announces, "Ten.
Tomorrow. One, a male, will be all black.
The other nine will be females, streaked with white."

And so it happens. And Calchas is undone.
Destroyed, he dies, we read, "in an excess of grief."

*

As if that business at Aulis were nothing. As if
the puzzling out of the plague at Troy had been nothing.
He is the author not of the *Iliad* and then the *Oresteia*
but of all those bloody and grand events they recount,
which ought to have weighed in the scale
against . . . what?
Figs and pigs!
And the worm of envy
that blinds and eats into the heart, that makes
profoundest wisdom partial.
What it makes, in the end, is a heavy heart.

*

The future, we have learned in a hard school,
is misty. The past, where we look for what we love
or are proud of to find that it jostles with shame, is also
misty.
And which of us could bear it, otherwise—
clear, plain as day? We walk a knife-edge,
chasms on either side, and we learn
never to look down, or almost never.

*

In the *Argonautica* a similar duel:
Mopsus foretells, as it turns out quite correctly,
much of the bloody business they face and the bloody

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consequences: Medea, the butchered babies.
But Idmon gets up and, although he leaves out a lot,
predicts success. There are tears running down his cheeks
the crew supposes are those of joy, but we know
better and see their happy error. We see
what he can see: his own death. Does Mopsus
resent Idmon's intrusion? Does he see, too?
Not told, we are not prevented from supposing
whatever we may like or find congenial.
But we are invited to make it a better story.

*

The lines in his palm the baby is born with map
the road his feet will travel, but do not peek:
even if you could tell the story, let him
find his own voice. The plot may be fixed
but he may contrive stylistic variations
no one could have expected by which he will change
everything, or better redeem everything,
or at the least put it into quotes.

Stare into his eyes and let what wisdom
your years have accumulated meet his hopes.
Can you say, positively, which of you is wrong?

*

This habit of leaning into the future is cruel.
Distinction is what we inherit or earn: our status
is always a gift of the status quo, our past
being what we are. What we may become
is for preachers and politicians, the demagogues,
who threaten or promise. It does not own us yet.

Mopsus' showy tricks are irrelevant, vulgar,
a lounge act. A singer would do as well,
or even a poet, Calchas. But you were undone
nonetheless. It wasn't Mopsus but you,
your own doubts that required you, every day,
to prove again the god's favor.

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As if the gods were constant.
As if Apollo had not, for a time, done duty
as shepherd for Admetos.

Apollo knew who he was,
but your faith, Calchas, failed.
As Mopsus—that was his real trick—guessed it might.

*

Beyond the lounge, you can hear the casino noises,
the pulling of cranks, the clatter of coins, the bells
when a jackpot hits. The "gaming industry"
isn't a game either. And the money is only
tokens.
What they yearn for, every one,
is the gods' favor. The smiling of fates that have heard
their prayers and been moved to answer. Lacking that,
what of worth can remain, or what other ruin
could matter?
There is no time, no day or night,
and the garish lights may stand for the stars or flash
like beacons beckoning, warning.
Those who have faith
do not require assurance. But we who doubt
and therefore want the gods, know sacrifice
is necessary—what we ourselves would demand
in the way of worship, penance, and punishment.
Cherries, bars, and lemons. Figs and pigs.
For Mopsus, the big winner, the bells go off
and the management sends him back home in a limo.
For Calchas, the last indignity—the bus
with the other losers. That's what did him in.

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ANNIE FINCH

To Artemis at Ephesus

The statue of Artemis in her temple at Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Twenty-breasted Diana, the temple tamed you.
You are veiled, then uncovered, as we watch you
move in your bright chariot through the city.
Our priests sacrifice, sell your silver image,
guard your treasure and help us hear your answer.
But you leave us by night and wander, hunting
in the grove between rivers near the temple.

In that grove, where expectant stags will hear the
coming arrows, wild moonlight shines out milky
on the dry leaves. Your quick feet, cool and silent,
shadow through the sharp pattern. Though you nurture
every creature—the sirens, sphinxes, griffins,
bees and lions who climb your pillared body—
still you kill them. The sculptures gathered near you—

Rhoecus' statue of Night, and Praxiteles'
marble figures—are famous through the world.
Heraclitus took sanctuary with you;
Alexander once tried to carve his name
as benefactor to you, and was refused.
Now the Amazons, who once took asylum
with you, draw huge stone swords outside your doorway.

You are "worshipped by Asia, and the world."
Here, for almost a thousand years, the smoky
burning bodies have kissed your fountained courtyards.
Greeks and Persians have left their treasure with you;
icons, legacies, offerings and spoils

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all wait safe in your keeping. Virgin, Magos,
magic, great mother, Magna Mater, hunter,

Epiphanes, you shine out from the window
lifted high in the closed and glowing temple,
till the priest turns away from sacrificing
at the altar to watch you, and the people
turn to where you have manifested, marble.
Tonight your statue is waiting, veiled and hidden,
for the worshippers who gather in the morning

at your thicket of breasts, the pomegranate
of your chest where the universe is suckled.
Through the night where you hunt us now, eternal,
future "Queen of the Witches," we have sought you,
polymaste Diana, multimammae,
ancient wearer of the Ephesian words
that bring victors their strength and nurture armies.

Look—the night sky shines down inside the glowing
Artemisium, colonnaded silver.
Stroke this forest of marble-rooted columns
with your moon made of arrows, and your body,
which embraces a hundred twenty-seven
strong carved pillars in touch as thick as darkness,
before you move to the denser trees, beyond.

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Lamia to Lycius

> "A serpent!" echoed he; no sooner said
> than with a frightful scream she vanished
> and Lycius' arms were empty of delight,
> as were his limbs of life, from that same night.
> —John Keats, "Lamia"

Do you hear me, Lycius? Do you hear these dreams
moving like words out of the air, it seems?
You think you saw me thin into a ghost,
impaled by his old eyes, with their shuddering boast
of pride that kills truth with philosophy.
But you hear this voice. Is it a serpent's, or
is it a woman's, this rich-emblazoned core
reaching out loud for you, as I once reached
for you with my two hands, and your whole life beseeched?
I had a woman's eyes, that cried such tears
my serpent body broke, and woman's teeth
that never bit, although the ruddy wreath
of my soft lips was closing. But my heart
crawled like a serpent, and that is the part
you married, Lycius, when you made the sun
shine over my damp earth, and grew with me to one.
I had thought our love was stronger than belief,
close enough to absorb such stinging grief!
But now I am all serpent, and I go
where serpents go, taking my path, as slow
as any creature fallen to the earth—
though I will flash with somber fire mirth
through my volcano belly when you come near,
till every human word you say is clear.

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GINGER ANDREWS

An Early Spring

We've all been devastated
since week before last
when my husband's best buddy took his own life.
Thirty-eight years old. He wasn't even drunk.
We can't imagine what we'll do with his mother.
We're just sick

about the earthquake in Japan, tired of O.J., cold rain
and Jehovah's Witnesses knocking
asking questions like, are you suffering from burnout?

This last divorce has all but done my sister in.
Her big old red Ford sits broken down
under our carport, finally out of the rain.
Mushrooms grow on its back floorboard.
My sister plans to stay just till she's back on her feet.
Her five-year-old spoiled brat of a kid
calls me Grumpy Old Aunt Gin,
tells me she misses her Daddy
and that she's scared bad of her Uncle Mikey
'cause he makes her mind.
She's into my underwear, my makeup—
I can't find my blush anywhere.
She asks endless questions like, does Jesus have a girlfriend?
Today she handed me a just-picked bouquet of daffodils,
said she got them in the neighbor's yard.

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The Day I Looked in the Mirror and Saw Nothing

It was late afternoon. Ninety-plus degrees in Dillard, Oregon.
Dad was pulling green chain at Hult Lumber Company.
I'd been missing Mom real bad, but remembered her last days
Of pain, how cancer made her cry out, and I knew
There was no pain in heaven.
My three oldest sisters were married and gone.
My sweet, habitual offender brother was doing time
For some stupid parole violation.
There was just my sister Mary Beth and me at home.
She was playing Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Proud Mary"
On our cheap stereo.
I was wondering what we'd cook for dinner
Besides canned soup. And I was wondering,
Being thirteen and all, if I'd ever get any breasts.
My older sisters wore 34B, C, or *D*.
I thought I'd just lock myself in the bathroom
And check to see if maybe
I'd grown a little bit.

Mikey Likes It

the way I wait on him
hand and foot, wash his hair
most mornings, fry up hashbrowns,
mend his work jeans and in general
act interested even when I'm not.
Mikey likes back rubs, "Renegade" reruns,
race cars, fishing poles, guns,
beef jerky and a beefed-up truck.
He doesn't do dishes or yard work. He forgets
my birthday and doesn't bring me flowers.
No candy. No sweet talk. But I know

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he loves me. He pays the bills,
gives my grown boys bear hugs
and money when he sees a need.
Once he charged a new set of tires
for my sister's old car
because she's alone and poor.
If you need a place to stay,
Mikey will give you our key.

Thanksgiving

> Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.
>
> —Hebrews 13:2

If the almost perfectly fluted edge
of your homemade pumpkin pie's crust burns
even though you carefully crinkled aluminum foil around it
as soon as you noticed it was browning way too fast,
for goodness sake don't cry. Just cut it off.
Swirl Cool Whip around where the crust was.
Nobody really cares. They will eat it.
Life will go on, trust me. The truth is
There's always someone with a sadder story.

If your father hasn't had both of his legs amputated,
if he isn't lying on a pee-stained mattress;
doesn't have bed sores, a diaper rash, a shriveling liver,
a bad heart and cataracts; if your sister
isn't burnt black from neck to groin
from radiation, if chemo
doesn't have her full of phlegm and bile, trust me,
these are your good times.

The trick is keeping busy, cleaning house, cooking, opening
your door to strangers, entertaining all possible angels.

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JIM HENLEY

How the Ground Lies

Hazards Here, the sign says: Broken Glass,
Deep Water, Open Pits, Sharp Metal, Nails,
Rubble Piles, Unmarked Washouts, Wildlife.
ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK, in block letters.

We enter, but we might as well be gods
descending on the aftermath of battle
for all that anything can harm us here.
Just as we took the farm road east from Waco
we'll take it back again, no worse for wear,
having bestowed three dollars on the squatter
who calls herself a bishop. She keeps to her shack
but offers us toilet paper for the outhouse;
is sorry that today she can't sell pamphlets.
"Of course," I say. "It's Saturday." The sabbath.

What are we risking? Some embarrassment
at the tar paper shed with her exhibits—
photos of burning buildings; lists of the dead;
copies of irrelevant court papers?
Contamination from the marker where
the wrong sort planted a memorial grove?
Granted the sharp edge of the outhouse drainpipe
is a genuine danger to our most mortal parts.
But that negotiated we become
untouchable—except for a faint sense
that if somebody asked why we were here
our answer would be no more satisfactory
than were the answers of our predecessors.
To check on our investment? To be able to say
that we were here before the real museum?

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We like the way the place has been picked clean
of totems of easy sympathy. No broken dolls;
nothing with bullet holes. The tangled grasses
have long since eaten what there was of ash.
Two hulks of buses evince nothing but
the patient fires of rust. The pile of refuse
runs to box springs, metal sheeting, drums.

Then the ground flexes beneath my feet. A patch
of yellow metal peeks through a layer of dirt.
I tell my friend that we are standing on
the buried school bus that nobody reached,
the trap door blocked with rubble the tanks made.
Enough has washed away that we can see
into the entrance tunnel, but it is
too much like meeting a celebrity.

Better to stand and see how the ground lies:
the stacks of concrete pylons; the wide fields;
the farm pond in the omnipresent wind.
It looks like the opposite of what it is.
It looks like someplace that the world passed by,
a farm whose soil gave out, or a garage
the Interstate put off the beaten path.

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Independence

Comets, starfish, switchback dace,
willows, jackpots of glittering coins, and hairnets—
the fireworks bloom as absurdly
as evolution itself,
and with a Big Bang.

Cosmologists want to replace "Big Bang"
with something more genteel, but they got it right the first time.
I saw my baby being born
and it was loud—mother, nurses, monitors, then
the star of the hour.

Now we lie on our backs, knees up,
and the youngest scream at what they understand
perfectly well.
Novae light nebulae of smoke
for the finale, then

we rise, stretch and get our balance back
and on the ride home, a slim girl
at the edge of her parents' lawn
holds up twin
handfuls of green fire.

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JOAN MURRAY

Light in the Field

All night you've seen a light across the field,
close to the ground, not very far away—
a curving length of luminousness—
the shape of someone lying in the grass.
You saw it first when you reached
to find your blanket. It was glowing in the field
that stretches from the porch. But when you
moved to the door to get closer, it must have
heard your steps—in an instant it was gone.
You lay down again. And watched it reappear
(just where it had been). Yet each time
you approached, it fled away. Could it be
a trick of light?—or a trickster half-concealed?—
or a god sleeping naked in the field?
You think of the thrush—how each morning
it invites you to the mysteries of its song.
But when you take your binoculars
or go (so quietly) to the door where you've
left a tape to record it, it seems to know—
it goes away, saying, I am *this*—I am a *gift*
that you have no right to extend.

Isn't it the same with the light? All night
you've enjoyed its company: You've liked
the teasing and implying, the pursuit
and the escape. Still you can't refrain from *knowing*
what it is. You pull on your robe and stand
before the door where you block it from its source.
Now you *know*—it was *only* a reflection—
only your *own* light—spilling in from the hallway,
beneath the curtain to your room. You pull open

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the door—and send it away forever.
But admit that for hours, it *was* something else—
a lover who had rolled onto his side
so you couldn't glimpse his face. Admit how you
enjoyed his attentions—until knowledge
came thumping in and dismissed him.
Now it's almost dawn. The field is full of mist.
You step out on the porch—and hear the sounds
of something moving through the grass. Could it be
a gust of wind or a fluttering of the thrush?
Listen—don't look—it *could* be your god.

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ROBERT FARNSWORTH

Long Light

Perhaps 'tis tender too and pretty
at each wild word to feel within
a sweet recoil of love and pity.
—S. T. Coleridge

Heading to work in a fine drizzle, after dropping
them at school, I watch a man in a silver hat lifted
in a bucket to the wires, to restore the dangerous

benefits of voltage. If my sons were here I might
explain him as hero, not perhaps with just that word—
but thinking about excess, about violent energies.

What was I roaring about? Shall I take this shame
to mean my anger was an excess of love? Why
did I twist their mornings so any thought of home

today will bring a hollow to their guts? I know
that hollow. Something in me seeks that loneliness,
as if only there could I convert some long-dead pain

to resolve. He's wrenching at a bolt, patiently but hard,
and down here my blood runs fresh and poisonous
at once, as if I had understood at last something left

unfinished long ago. This current has no beginning.
It is theirs as well, a cold dream that will keep revisiting
each of them alone, to be survived. The steel arm is

lifting him down. Wiping rain from his face with a sleeve,
he hooks the wrench in his tool belt. The gloomy houses
reinflate with light. The signal turns deliberately to green.

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JOHN LOUGHERY

Subject Matter in Modern Art

SOME YEARS AGO, THE BRITISH WRITER IAN DUNLOP wrote a book and *Time* art critic Robert Hughes appeared in a television documentary (later a separate book) with the same title: *The Shock of the New*. Whatever difficulties still exist for us in the Modernist art covered by these two projects, and there can't be many, the one dimension of the subject we are irretrievably separated from is that suggested by Dunlop and Hughes's title. No one born after 1930 can know the unsettling chill a first sight of a Munch or an Ensor might have inspired, or the combined fascination and repugnance provoked even in adventurous viewers by *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* or a Kandinsky "Improvisation." Thus our experience of these works is fundamentally different from that of previous generations—and not only different, but diminished. Our grandparents were necessarily closer to one of the artists' primary motivations. Any chance, then, to recover a trace of that original dislocation is all to the good. Brushing aside the entombing aura of the familiar and the unthreatening is one of a curator's most important tasks.

The Fernand Léger retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art and the Arthur Dove retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art managed to do just that, while collectively offering a mini-history of the fits and starts of early abstraction. In fact, Léger and Dove are probably among the few early-twentieth-century artists for whom this enterprise is even possible. Neither has been posterized to death, turned into fodder for calendars and appointment books, or been the subject of enough books and exhibitions to evoke a knee-jerk response. In the case of Léger, there is still a vaguely off-putting quality to some of the work (especially in his sometimes metallic colors), which forces us to look long and hard at the paintings—to work the eye more than the memory.

The MoMA retrospective began in a grand and ingratiating fashion, though. *Woman in Blue* (1912) from the Kunstmuseum in Basel is a Cubist tour de force, an early fruit of Léger's rejection of the Impressionist paintings he had labored over in his twenties (most of which he destroyed) and a headlong drive into the new aesthetic of Picasso, Braque, and Gris. Yet the size of the canvas (six feet high), its energized cylindrical forms, and the planes of red, white, black, and—most flamboyantly—blue indicate impatience right from the start with the more restrained, monochromatic nature of classic Cubism. It is an ambition evident as well in the equally complex *Smokers* (1911), the

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more famous painting from the Guggenheim, which was also in the MoMA show. At a quick-step pace (five Cubist works only, in a cramped space—onward!), we were steered into the wider gallery that featured a fairer sampling of the artist's "Contrast of Forms" experiments, a group that earns my vote for the most un-captivating byway of early Modernism. With these paintings from the eve of World War I, we see Léger determined to break even more definitively with predecessors and contemporaries alike, organizing square or rounded segments of blue, red, and yellow into ostensibly hectic arrangements, some more abstract than others. A number allude to the human figure in motion (e.g., the pell-mell *Ballets Russes in Exile*), and all advance the painter's obsession—never to be relinquished—with mechanization, while others try their best to ignore any grounding in anecdote or illusionism. One of the interesting qualities of these landmarks in anti-representation is the way in which even the brushwork embodies a divided allegiance: the strokes of paint on the individual planes or segments are often meant to convey the effect of a sheen on a surface of sleek metal, but their very chalkiness on the thick, grainy canvas is old-style sensuous, traditional, *painterly*, in a manner that is at odds with the wish to sever ties with the past of Monet, Bonnard, still-life, nineteenth-century genre, and cafe tables under the trees. Not surprisingly, Léger was already vocal by this time on the theme of modern art's triumph over subject matter, thus establishing the men of his generation as trailblazers of a particularly radical sort.

One point that came through loud and clear at the MoMA exhibition, though, was how much of Léger's art seems not to have buried the issues of the past but, rather, to be *caught* between the past and the present, a predicament that is both dismaying and fascinating. On the one hand, no one has done the urban experience better from a Modernist angle—*La Ville* (1919) is Cubism and clamor, color and congestion, billboards and trestles, exhilaration and confusion to just the right degree, an endlessly absorbing picture—and paintings like *Ball Bearings* (1926) and *Composition with Hand and Hats* (1927) take still-life into genuinely new realms, in the latter case as cinematic as anything done on canvas could be. Private life, psychology, and individuality have been successfully jettisoned by Léger, as they were by Kandinsky, Delaunay, and so many others. But nature, the masterworks of the past, and public life—vivid subject matter, if ever there was any—proved much harder to let go of. The "purifying" project of High Modernism was never as complete as its rhetoric implied. The much-admired, highly allusive *Three Women* (*Le Grand Déjeuner*) (1921) from the Modern's own collection has always looked as silly as it was adventurous in turning its lounging ladies of antiquity into mechanized forms with Veronica Lake cascades of hair, though its craft (e.g., the De Stijl backdrop) is never unimpressive. The same can't be said for the three small paintings of holly leaves in the next room, the murky orange-green *Mona Lisa with Keys* (1930), or even some of the paintings from Léger's explicitly "mechanical period" in which the fingers, torsos, and faces of beefy

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workers take on the shape and texture of the levers and cylinders of the factories that define their existence. Though he indisputably managed to achieve a level that approaches the timeless and the purely, sumptuously aesthetic in later works, such as *Big Julie* (1945) and *Three Musicians* (1945), too much of early Léger has always struck me as more 1920s time-bound, subject-bound, and topically earnest than the art-historical literature would suggest, and this retrospective confirmed that feeling for me.

An interest in "the grand subject"—from an artist whose statements about the death of subject matter became more emphatic with each pronouncement—was an out-and-out preoccupation by the 1930s and 1940s. And how could it be otherwise for a robust soul, less austere or cerebral than Mondrian or Kandinsky, in love with "the people" and the sights, sounds, and even the slang of everyday life? Léger was part of the great wave of European artists and intellectuals who made their way to the United States after the fall of France. Almost sixty when he arrived in 1940, he was a natural enthusiast for what he called the "overloaded spectacle" of New York City and the "anti-melodic intensity" and exciting bad taste of America. (Another famous émigré's remark comes to mind: "There is nothing so invigorating as Philistine vulgarity." But for Léger, unlike Vladimir Nabokov, satire was never the point.) It was during this five-year period of exile that Léger produced his divers, cyclists, and acrobats series, which do indeed take their energy from his untidy place of refuge and were too sparsely represented in the MoMA show. From 1946 until his death in 1955, back in Europe, Léger concentrated no less assiduously on subject matter taken from ordinary life, hewing to a Tolstoyan line that rejected elitist ideas about art that did not speak to the common man. The tensions that this dichotomy brought to bear—proletarian sympathies at war with faith in abstraction (or quasi-abstraction)—were evoked with precision in the last gallery of the retrospective, and for this viewer were the most challenging part of the show.

Construction Workers of 1950 makes it under the wire: the heartiness of the theme (big-biceped men on scaffolds high above the street, girders going up) meshes with a complicated pictorial structure of sharply color-contrasting verticals, horizontals, and orthogonals with clouds that have the thickness of tarpaulins. Colors, forms, and space are fantastic, as unnatural and illusion-defying as a skyscraper erection actually is. But with a painting like *Leisure, Homage to David* (1948), showing a group of bicyclists on a countryside outing, we saw something closer to the heart of Léger's dilemma. Leaves on the ground, clouds overhead, arms, faces, and bicycle tires have an equivalent lumpish weight. The ease a picnic setting would normally evoke is an anachronism in this context. Nature itself is a memory; the elegant green trees in the middle of *Smokers* from the Cubist era are long gone. But the setting, the topic itself, isn't anything Léger cares to abandon. *Leisure* is a painting that wants to live by elitist allusion to the canon (all those generations of alfresco group

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scenes), by a truculent reinvention of an old format, by both tightness and lyricism, and so—magnificently or quixotically, depending on your taste—exhausts itself (and the viewer) in the process. Like several other works in this part of the show, it kept for me, after several return visits, that rarest of qualities in a fifty-year-old painting: it was shocking and bothersome, an arduous rather than an easy experience.

With Arthur Dove, we have a good deal less muscle and naked ambition, but also a good deal more certainty about his course away from representation. A member of Alfred Stieglitz's "291" circle that included John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Charles Demuth, and a highly capable Fauve still-life painter (e.g., the 1909 *Still Life Against Flowered Wall Paper*), Dove was the early-twentieth-century American most committed to pure abstraction before World War I—and, not surprisingly, the hardest for Stieglitz to sell to uncertain patrons. He also exhibited the fewest visible tensions concerning subject matter in his work, or at least an acknowledgement of the roots of his abstraction in nature; the passage from faintly recognizable objects to painterly forms that exist only on the canvas is less disruptive in Dove than in almost any other artist. For once, the oft-heard analogy equating abstract painting with the purity of music makes sense. While the "Orphist" Robert Delaunay (subject of a small-scale Guggenheim show at the same time as the Léger and Dove shows) was laboring to subdue the Eiffel Tower with his fractured planes and diverse color schemes, Dove was effecting a more harmonious relation with the sunsets, pine trees, sand barges, flour mills, seagulls, harbors, and foliage of New York State. The Whitney's retrospective, the first in twenty-five years (on view, also, in the fall of 1998 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art), was a seamless and proportionate display of a body of work more sensibly concerned with mood, aura, and the evocation of rhythms through color and shape than with a systematic program, theory, or the needs of his urban audience or his era. *Plant Forms*, *Sails*, and *Team of Horses*, all from 1912, perch us on a fence between an interest in Dove's starting point suggested by his titles and an interest in how much or how little the images before us have to do with those topics. By the time of *Alfie's Delight* (1929), *Cows in Pasture* (1935), and *Swing Music* (1938), we are not really thinking about Lake George, dairy farms, or Louis Armstrong at all, and that is Dove's gift—in color, composition, and brushwork—and his triumph, born less of a need to put subject matter in its place than to work with it and move, but only so far, beyond it.

Nowhere does the spirit of an uneasy relationship to traditional themes loom larger today than in the area of portraiture. From the young noblemen of Holbein and Van Dyck to the less quickly characterized faces by Vuillard and Kokoschka, the old idea of content—interpretive verisimilitude, personalized expressiveness—was important. The person mattered; the image in relation to the person mattered. Talking in those terms today, in some circles, is akin to talking about

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"character development" or "the dramatic unities." Different readings of the situation will place the rupture at different moments in the history of modern art. Are Cézanne's many versions of his wife or Victor Chocquet entirely devoid of concern for likeness or psychology, for a sense of "placing" the sitter in the world as an individual with a story of his own and a role to play? Well, yes and no. Picasso's *Gertrude Stein* is clearly as much about portrait-making and a new view of painting as it is about the author of *Three Lives,* but who can ignore the quirky biographical element of the work? Even Arthur Dove's abstract evocation of Stieglitz (more about his camera than his physiognomy) hits us with a sense of the artist having wittily "gotten" his subject just right.

Be that as it may, post-Freud, post-Hitler, post-Organization Man, nothing so readily branded an artist as outdated than a desire to paint portraits. For Chuck Close, subject of a MoMA retrospective last winter, the problem was sidestepped by a veneer of "cool" that took Photo-Realism to new heights, literally (given the size of the canvases) as well as figuratively. (Though one might assume from the museum's publications on Close that the artist's original impulse had as much to do with getting off the Abstract Expressionist bandwagon as it did from "a desire to paint portraits.") He always aimed to treat his people "flat-footedly, without editorial comment," he said—to divest the image of humanist accretions, to exult in restrictiveness and detachment. (Close cites Ad Reinhardt as an important early influence.) Of course, the black-and-white *Big Self-Portrait* of 1967 makes quick work of that notion. Unshaven, presumably unbathed, long hair uncombed, cigarette dangling from his lips, eyes glazed, the sitter-maker of this smart, startling painting (a towering 103″ x 83″) depicted himself in the most calculated of late sixties poses (as legitimate as any other, I hasten to add), a kind of talented boy's "screw you" to the more buttoned-down art world, to academic portraitists, to Action Painting's "cult of personality" angst.

Dozens of such blown-up mug shots, years of "screw you's," become excruciatingly tedious, and it was a merciful development that Close branched out into other tributaries of this one river as the decades passed. *Jud/Collage* (1982) and *Georgia* (1985) are made out of wet pulp paper on canvas and introduce an unexpectedly sensuous surface, which ironically (intentionally?) makes the faces themselves seem even less important. But the heart and soul (or denial of soul) of the work has remained constant. Nowhere is curator Robert Storr more off-the-mark than when he writes of "the unexpected encounter [that takes place] between the sitter and the viewer" of these paintings, as a direct result of Close's position of "scrupulously neutral intermediary." No interaction whatsoever takes place—possibly excepting the strangely tender *John* (1971)—and that I would think is the point, as it is in certain postmodernist novels and films. But you can't have it both ways: the "uncanny fellow feeling" Storr writes of and a style that glories in the demolition of affect are conflicting ends.

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The part of the show that most interested viewers, myself included, was the more recent, brighter work painted in oil (rather than the earlier acrylic and pencil), built up out of thousands of dabs of paint—Pointillism-manqué—in hundreds of tiny, angled grids. The subjects are art-world personalities, though that fact by itself means nothing. By virtue of his beard and hair spiking off in all directions, Lucas Samaras alone retains something that might be called *flair* in his two portraits, but Alex Katz, Roy Lichtenstein, Cindy Sherman, April Gornik, and Francesco Clemente might as well be any randomly selected bumps-on-a-log. That observation would seem to imply the most rigorous formalism on the part of the artist, which naturally leads us to conclude that we are meant to be concerned with method and surface alone. Fair enough, but if we want to appreciate the paintings *as paintings*, we have to approach them unabashedly, get closer than usual to the wall, stare at minuscule marks on canvas. Yet that quickly comes to feel like a foolish exercise before squiggles that are meaningless units of cotton-candy color, uncountable, unlovable, and separate unto themselves. Conversely, if we still want to experience the paintings as representations of people, we have to keep a greater distance than usual to avoid a blurring not only of the outline or the features, but a blurring of anything recognizable. A chin, a brow, a nose is gone in no time. Moreover, Close's technique exacts a price from the obstinate viewer. How far back should we have to go to readjust our vision so that the image will come back into focus as a person, whole and self-contained? The eyes in *Paul* (1994), for instance, never come back into focus as representations of eyes once we have played too aggressively with the illusionism (or at least not until we leave the gallery and come back at another time). Is this anything more than an Op Art game? Is this a comment on the nature of seeing, on the gulf that modern art has chosen to explore between the *what* and the *how* of a painting? Take your choice, though there is no reason to assume that it could not be a bit of both. A fair and clever warning about the terrain we were entering was provided in the corridor leading to the Close exhibition on the third floor: one pair of Philip Pearlstein nudes, one Andy Warhol, one Alex Katz, one Sol Lewitt. The repetitious and the deadpan, the skillful and the smart-ass—it is all there in Chuck Close, a talented and problematic painter rather than a deep or likeable one.

To end on a resolutely upbeat note, as is my wont: it is nice to be able to report on a positive development at a much-beleaguered institution, the Whitney, whose director departs this year to head the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. David Ross's seven-year tenure was a troubled one, a situation largely of his own making, but he departs having rectified a wrong that dates back to the beginning of the decade. The museum once again has a permanent-collection gallery where students of art can study the history of American creativity on canvas and paper, where out-of-towners can see the major painters they are curious about as well as the exhibitions of the moment, and where everyone can

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rejoice that the Whitney's Calders, Hoppers, Gorkys, and Rothkos are out of storage and back where they belong. The straight time-line arrangement, the formulaic groupings, and the lack of any major surprises in the oil-on-canvas selections are disappointing, but the rooms are appealing (if not commodious), the lighting is crisp, and the juxtapositions are savvy. An entire room devoted to works on paper brings together artists as different as Burchfield, Sloan, de Kooning, Guston, and John Wilde, while the two great World War I military emblem pictures of Marsden Hartley—recently cleaned (I would guess) and sparklingly fresh—look nothing short of joyous.

Walking through these rooms on their opening day, it was also interesting to reflect on what would have been different in previous decades in a similar canonical space. It is doubtful we would have found Florine Stettheimer, represented by the funky grandeur of *New York/ Liberty* (1918), in the august company of Marin, Demuth, and Dove, and that change signifies progress to my mind. The canon expands. (The paucity of women artists is apt to stir comment from the Guerrilla Girls. Stettheimer, Elsie Driggs, Louise Nevelson, and way too many Georgia O'Keeffes don't quite make it as a sum total, not when room can be found for a weak Andrew Wyeth, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry.) Nor, in past years, would we have been treated to Jo Hopper's bare back in *New York Interior* (1921) or her husband's equally homey, humble, small-scale Parisian scenes, or an entire room of well-chosen photographs, in which the Whitney declares its commitment to an art form long ignored on 75th Street. Weegee's nightscapes and Diane Arbus' portraits took a rightful place with the Ashcan realists, the Precisionists, and the ominous gloom of George Tooker and Peter Blume.

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KAREN WILKIN

Radical Bonnard

ONE OF THE MOST DELIGHTFUL PUBLICATIONS IN THE HISTORY of modern painting is a slender volume of letters exchanged by Pierre Bonnard and his friend Henri Matisse.[1] The correspondence begins in 1925—Bonnard was fifty-eight, Matisse two years younger—and continues until 1946—the year before Bonnard's death—although the two men knew each other earlier. It's an oddly formal record since, as products of a particular generation and class, they always use the polite "vous," and despite their close friendship and their evident esteem for one another's work, a great deal is left unsaid. A great deal *is* said, however, about each artist's state of health. Almost every letter includes a report on how the writer is feeling and inquiries about the other's condition, along with observations about the weather, and helpful suggestions for preserving one's well-being. "My dear Bonnard," Matisse wrote at the beginning of 1935, "I advise you as well as your wife to take every precaution to avoid the flu, which is everywhere at the moment. About ten days ago I caught it quite thoughtlessly: I stayed in a draft I should have avoided." (Bonnard responded with the news that he, too, had had "a touch of flu but without any fever" and that, because of this, he was "still very careful not to try to act like a young man." No frivolous sitting in drafts for the prudent Bonnard!)

Most of the collected letters date from the years of the Second World War. Earlier, the two painters saw each other and each other's work fairly often, so the extant messages of the 1920s and 1930s are frequently nothing more than invitations to lunch or reminders of appointments, confirmation that the two painters enjoyed one another's company, but not very revealing. More interesting are the postcards Matisse sent to Bonnard when he went to New York and Tahiti; he found the former incredibly stimulating and praised the latter for its "pure light, pure air, pure color: diamond, sapphire, emerald, turquoise." Matisse wrote, as well, to announce the successful installation of the mural Dr. Albert C. Barnes commissioned for his home in Merion, Pennsylvania in 1933. Bonnard expressed his delight at the news: "as I was present at the birth of your work, understood it, admired it as I watched its completion."

But in the 1940s, the rigors of life in wartime France—shortages, lack

[1] *Bonnard-Matisse Correspondance*, presenté par Jean Clair et Antoine Terrasse. Paris: Gallimard, 1991. English translation by Richard Howard, *Bonnard/Matisse: Letters Between Friends*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992.

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of transportation, and general discomfort, anxiety, and deprivation—plus Matisse's serious illness, surgery, and slow convalescence in 1941, kept the two painters apart, so that they wrote to each other more often and more fully than at any other time. Perhaps because they lacked direct contact in the studio, amid the discussions of major and minor illnesses, comments on the weather, and news of how acquaintances and colleagues were surviving the war, their letters of these years contain observations that leap off the page because they so urgently sum up each artist's aesthetic preoccupations of the moment. One of Bonnard's most frequently quoted, apparently deeply considered remarks about his aspirations for his art proves to be a throwaway line at the end of a note written in November 1940; after inquiring about what he owes Matisse for some paint and passing on "a rather reassuring tip about Nice, supposedly from the prefect" that the city will remain French, Bonnard closes with: "My work isn't going too badly and I dream of seeking the absolute."

Brief, loaded remarks attest to the high regard each painter had for the other. "When I think of you," Bonnard wrote, "I think of a mind cleansed of every old aesthetic convention, and it is that alone that permits a direct view of nature, the greatest joy that can befall a painter. I enjoy a little of that, thanks to you." Matisse begins his last letter to Bonnard by saying how touched he is by his friend's praise for a couple of his most recent works, declaring himself to be "very proud that these pictures interest you." As a postscript, he adds, "I am still cohabiting with your mysterious and alluring canvas."

It is fascinating to be offered this tantalizingly sparse and oblique view into the private world of these marvelous painters, in the last decades of their lives, yet it comes as no surprise that Bonnard should have had a good deal to say to Matisse—and vice versa. There are obvious similarities, both significant and trivial, between them. Nearly exact contemporaries, they both came from respectable middle-class families. Both studied law and abandoned it to paint. Both chose to live in the south. Both owned and cherished paintings of bathers by Cézanne. More important, they shared profound aesthetic convictions. Each clearly believed himself to be part of a long, continuous tradition, and each used the art of the past as a source and as a stimulus for his own inventions. Both turned their attention, in their art, on a circumscribed world of interiors and gardens. Both reconstructed their responses to that world in terms of masses of sublime colors, colors that function not simply as components in evoking perceptions, but as essential carriers of emotion. And so on.

There are also differences. Unlike Bonnard, who seems to have worked steadily to make his pictures increasingly diffuse, all-over, and elusive, Matisse strove all his long life to achieve greater clarity and economy in his art. Unlike his friend, who substituted nervous, Cézanne-like meetings of broken hues for linear drawing, Matisse aspired to fuse painting and drawing by forcing the edges of eloquent, flat, colored

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shapes to carry the burden of line at the same time that they expressed mass and spatial articulation. (He wrote to Bonnard about this in January 1940: "A colorist's drawing is not a painting. One must produce an equivalent in color.") Bonnard, even though he was no less dazzling or original a colorist than his friend, was never interested in the clearly defined contours with which Matisse transcribed his feelings. Rather, Bonnard was the quintessential master of ambiguity, of forms and shapes that dissolve into adjacent patches of color and then slowly reassemble themselves as we watch. He may have dreamt of seeking the absolute, but he seems to have been a painter of the barely glimpsed, of the fleeting.

The world of Matisse's paintings, particularly in his mature years, was largely an artificial one of studio props, deliberately arranged; his gardens, his Arab "paradises" were reconstructed indoors out of patterned fabrics and potted plants, populated by odalisques dressed up for the occasion. Bonnard's universe, on the other hand, seems *real*, wholly domestic. Even though his densely woven webs of color seem about to unravel into their component touches and hues under the pressure of scrutiny, his pictures of informally seated women, laden tables, languid bathers, and nudes at their toilette call up such specific times of day, such particular qualities of light, and such familiar emotional temperatures that you are completely persuaded of the reality of their themes. Some of Bonnard's landscapes are like snapshots from a sun-drenched Mediterranean Eden; you can hear the cicadas buzz in the afternoon heat and smell the rosemary. Others distill the moist air, cool light, and small leafed vegetation of a northern French springtime into "unreal" but utterly convincing harmonies of grey-green, pale lemon, and chalky blue. Bonnard's pictures are so sensuously resonant that you are willing to believe that you are being given an accurate view of the dining room and the terrace of his house, a truthful image of the garden and the red tile rooftops beyond. The shape of a window, the pattern of a tablecloth, the objects reflected in the mirror of a dresser begin to seem so familiar that their powerful associations nearly overwhelm the pictures' formal properties. Knowing that the model for most of the nudes was the artist's lifelong companion, muse, and (after 1925) wife, Marthe, simply reinforces the impression that Bonnard was a kind of modern realist painter driven by a desire to be faithful to perception; it comes as a surprise to learn that he painted chiefly from memory. All of which is a roundabout way of saying that, at least at first glance, Matisse appears to reinvent his responses with remarkable freedom and daring in terms of eloquent, brilliantly colored shapes, while Bonnard seems to replicate his experience more cautiously and more recognizably. This polarity has led to Matisse's usually being labeled as the radical modernist of the pair, and Bonnard as the conservative or, as he has often been characterized, as a kind of Neo-Impressionist. Or is he?

The notion that Bonnard was a reactionary painter is persistent. A popular New York magazine known for its intellectual pretensions

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recently described him as "the last great inheritor of the Impressionist tradition" who, "in the years between the World Wars, while European art was furiously reinventing itself . . . was quietly looking backward." Leaving aside the writer's fashionable assessment of the importance of the advent of Dada and Surrealism between the wars, the question remains as to whether Bonnard really was a backward-looking latter-day Impressionist. He himself would surely have disputed this notion hotly: "One always speaks of submitting to the demands of nature," he wrote in his diary in 1939. "There is also submitting to the demands of the picture." Only a few years earlier he noted that the painter's "principal subject is the surface, which has its color, its laws, over and above those of objects."

To call Bonnard an Impressionist is visibly problematic. He may have divided his color, but he did so for expressive effect, not in order to approximate the sensations of actuality. Unlike his distinguished predecessors (who, it turns out, were notably hostile to his first exhibited works), Bonnard rarely dealt with the world of the street or with public spectacles after the first few years of his career; instead, he concentrated on seemingly insignificant moments in the daily routine, on ordinary activities unfolding in the most private rooms of his own home. If the idea of Bonnard the Impressionist is hard to defend, the idea of Bonnard the conservative artist is equally difficult to sustain. Part of what should alert us to his being a far more adventurous painter than is commonly supposed is his correspondence with Matisse. The surviving letters bear witness to a friendship between equals, a connection between artists with common problems and common goals. The very ellipsis of the letters is an indication of how much the two painters shared in their practice—little needed to be spelled out. Their brief notes are full of shorthand allusions to what must have been intense studio conversations. "I agree with you," Bonnard wrote in 1935, "that the painter's only solid ground is the palette and colors, but as soon as the colors achieve an illusion, they are no longer judged, and the stupidities begin." During the years of enforced separation, each painter declared his need to see the other's work, for stimulation and nourishment. "The sight of your paintings would lighten the wall in front of my nose right now and make me take things—my work above all—in a simpler and more direct way," Matisse wrote to his friend.

Matisse obviously thought of Bonnard as someone whose concerns and aspirations were similar to his own; and if you pay attention to Bonnard's paintings, it's easy to see why. But you have to get past their obvious seductions to grasp how adventurous they really are, both conceptually and formally. You have to detach yourself from the startling intimacy of his nudes to see how irreducibly modern they are, in spite of their obvious links to the tradition of Fragonard and Boucher. You have to resist the languorous southern heat, the perfumed landscape off the terrace, the after-lunch torpor suggested by his messy tabletops, and ignore the adorable dachshund and the agile cats, in

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order to concentrate on Bonnard's remarkable compositions and reckless viewpoints, his extraordinary conflations of shape, and his fearless reinventions of anecdotal detail—not to mention his virtuoso manipulations of color. Nothing in his mature paintings is quite what it seems. A figure at the edge of the canvas appears unexpectedly, wrestling herself into visibility out of an expanse of dappled color; dull and muddy hues plausibly suggest pearly skin tones; a tabletop tilts and shifts, sliding from a naturalistic horizontal plane to one parallel with the surface of the canvas, without displacing a single velvety fruit from a well-filled basket or spilling a drop from a carafe of wine. Bonnard's distinctive ways of putting together a picture become clearer the more of his work you see. Then it becomes easier to distance yourself from the delights of his nominal subjects and concentrate on the formal pleasures of his paintings. Then the rigor with which he subsumes anecdotal detail with color rhythms and the audacity with which he shifts scale and viewpoint become obvious. But in this country, although there are fine Bonnards in many museums, virtually the only place where his work can be seen in sufficient depth to form a clear opinion is the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., although most of its pictures come from the same period and share similar degrees of intensity and saturation. (The Phillips Collection includes a few representative works from the 1890s and the early 1900s, as well as a small, charming nude from the 1930s, but the great majority of its Bonnards are from the 1920s.) As a group, they are at once typical, wonderful, and not the whole story. I still remember the thrill of first entering the Bonnard room at the old Musée d'Art moderne in Paris—in the pre-Pompidou and pre-Musée d'Orsay era—and discovering a different side of the painter than anything I knew from Washington: a warm, dark, sexy picture of a naked (definitely not nude) man and woman against a background of tousled bedclothes, the canvas split vertically by a folded screen. It made my teen-aged knees weak, although I suspect this had as much to do with its frank sensuality, its palpable evocation of intimacy and gratified desire, as with its murky, superheated color and its surprising divided composition.

The list of major Bonnard exhibitions of the last few decades explains why, in this country, it has been difficult to come fully to terms with his achievement. You have to go back to 1964 for a major museum show devoted exclusively to Bonnard's work in New York—an exhibition organized by MoMA that traveled to Chicago and Los Angeles. Since then, smaller shows focusing on particular facets of Bonnard's activity have been presented by various New York galleries, most recently, overviews of his small-scale works on paper and his drawings, as well as a provocative study of his influence on Mark Rothko, but most of the serious, ambitious Bonnard exhibitions of the 1970s and 1980s were seen in Europe and Asia, not in the U.S. The exception was the splendid retrospective organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1984, which traveled to the Phillips and to Dallas. Now, at last, a far larger exhibition, consisting of more than a hundred well-chosen pictures

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(mostly canvases, with a few works on paper) from the late 1880s to the year of Bonnard's death, will be in New York from mid-June to mid-October, after an initial showing at the Tate Gallery, London.[2] This exemplary show offers a chance to reevaluate Bonnard, to get a sense of his real worth and his real inventiveness. And it's full of terrific pictures.

The current retrospective pays more attention to Bonnard's formative years than the Pompidou's exhibition did, allowing us to watch the young painter marshalling his resources and assembling the themes that would preoccupy him for the rest of his life: odd corners of rooms, people seated around tables, nudes dressing and bathing. The selection downplays the importance of Bonnard's early connection with the Symbolist painters, known as the Nabis, who used as their point of departure Gauguin's ideas about simplified forms and heightened color. Only a few of Bonnard's Nabi-type pictures are included, with their broadly painted, "Japanese" patches of unmodulated hues; instead, since the show emphasizes the originality and power of the painter's mature works, precedence is given to those early pictures that evidently prefigure later characteristics and announce compositional habits that will persist for almost half a century. The show includes early paintings whose innovative structures even seem to point towards abstraction, such as an 1895 still life, updated as a tabletop filling the entire surface of the canvas, punctuated by a basket of fruit that hovers against the rectangular expanse. A couple of small, but audaciously composed dining room pictures from 1899 anticipate Bonnard's future and, at the same time, suggest that he knew Matisse's large canvas *La Desserte* (1896–97), with its white tablecloth and glittering glassware, although Bonnard's admittedly modest pictures are, in fact, more adventurously conceived and executed than Matisse's. A series of nudes from around 1900, some pulling on black stockings, others sprawled voluptuously on rumpled beds, reveals both Bonnard's private obsessions and his dependence on poses from classical antiquity as the bases for the images he created to embody those obsessions.

If the selection makes clear the thematic seamlessness of Bonnard's development, it also dramatizes the change in his use of color after about 1905. There are hints of his abundant gifts as a colorist even in his earliest works—the delicate rose, blue-grey, and cream harmony of a luminous little streetscape of 1893, for example, or the amazing pastel bands behind the artist's head in a tiny, earnest self-portrait from about 1889. But what really signals Bonnard's maturity is his replacing the tonal riches of earlier canvases with complex, full-voiced orchestrations of vibrating, singing hues that ravish the eye and transform banal subject

[2] "Bonnard," curated by Sarah Whitfield, with consultants John Elderfield and David Sylvester, organized by the Tate Gallery, London in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, New York: Tate Gallery, 12 February–17 May 1998; Museum of Modern Art, 17 June–13 October 1998. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with essays by Sarah Whitfield and John Elderfield.

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matter into potent evocations of time and place—and the exhibition's strength is its lavish, thoughtful selection of gorgeously chromatic, mature (post-1913) pictures. (The selection differs slightly for each venue, but the weighting remains unchanged.)

Some of the most arresting works in the show play complicated games not only with hues, but with space and perception, as Bonnard knits figures into palpitating expanses of color or collapses space with reflections and transparencies. *The Mantelpiece* (1916, Margoline Collection) pits the reflection of an unabashedly posed, rounded nude model against the reflection of a painting of an aggressively flattened nude by Bonnard's friend Maurice Denis. It's a semiotician's dream—a fiction of an illusion of a fiction: a painting of a complicitous reflection and a reflected painted image—but what is most compelling is the play of reds, purples, and creamy whites, a sensuous palette seemingly at odds with the picture's four-square frontal structure. In other works, Bonnard uses the mirror not only to shift space, but to reveal a secret image, turning the viewer into a hidden voyeur. The wonderful *Bathroom Mirror* (1908, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow), punches a sharply cropped view of two women, one nude, into a loosely scribbled blue and cream surface that pulls itself together long enough to allude to a washstand and its accoutrements.

I wish *The Bathroom Mirror*'s 1913 cousin from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, with its reflected dachshund and cherry-sprinkled pitcher had been included; it would have been exciting to see these closely related, but differently proportioned and differently keyed canvases together, but that's a quibble. There are plenty of other opportunities to explore Bonnard's subtle manipulation of pictorial space in the exhibition's interiors with their tipped and tilted planes, or its landscapes with their tapestry-like fusions of near and far. In the landscapes and figure paintings alike, incidents are pushed to edges, barely flickering into your peripheral vision, suggesting that the picture is part of a vast continuous expanse that extends beyond the limits of the canvas; at the same time, the uniform intensity of color and of rhythmic touches of paint makes everything press insistently forward, emphasizing the artifice of the picture and the painter's inventiveness.

In Bonnard's late works, this compression and frontality, this merging of "figure" and "ground" is even more exaggerated, so that logical relationships of still life objects or furniture or figures seem irrelevant; everything is stretched and flattened by the apparent pressure of the edges of the canvas and the forward thrust of its surface. Among the most extreme manifestations of this tendency are the great horizontal paintings of nude women in the bath, a theme that Bonnard returned to at intervals for twenty years between 1925 and the end of his life. In the most inventive versions, the woman is self-contained, her long stretched-out figure focused inward, oblivious to kaleidoscopic play of color, the unstable shifts and flurries of interlocking hues in the water and the tiles that all but dissolve the figure; she merges with those

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patterns as everything—figure, water, tile, air itself—is reinvented as pure painting incident by Bonnard's urgent touches of the brush. At the other end of the spectrum from these lush, frontal "displays" of sensually disposed flesh/paint are the self-portraits that punctuate the exhibition. Bonnard represents himself, at any age, as frail, anxious, peering out in a fashion that makes the act of seeing the subject of the picture, while suggesting that the nervous artist simply snatched a look at himself before ducking out of sight. All in all, a wonderful show: visually sumptuous, demanding, and not to be missed.

The catalogue contains excellent comparative material, an informative essay by the exhibition's curator, Sarah Whitfield, and a wide-ranging, thought-provoking discussion of seeing by John Elderfield. Unfortunately, it suffers from rather dull entries and the appalling color reproductions that are too frequently standard issue in catalogues produced in the U.K. in recent years. But just ignore the reproductions, go to the show, and look hard.

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RICHARD HORNBY

Wilde Times

OSCAR WILDE TOOK A QUICK LOOK AT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY and died, in a cheap Paris hotel on November 30, 1900. He had lived his entire life under the reign of Queen Victoria, who only had a few weeks to go herself. He thus fully qualifies as a Victorian; even his secret sex life differs from that of other eminent writers, artists, and politicians of the period only by his homosexual orientation. With a concern for propriety that was typical of his age, he was certainly no early gay liberationist; he stoutly denied any "gross indecencies" with men at all three of his sensational trials in 1895, though he admitted them in private. Of course he had good reason to deny them publicly—they were illegal, which led to his imprisonment for two years at hard labor. But he could have escaped to France (a country he loved), where homosexuality was legal, and thumbed his nose at the prudes back across the Channel. Instead, he went to prison, and played the role of innocent martyr.

Nonetheless, so much of Wilde's life and career foreshadow twentieth-century concerns that he seems very much a man of our times. His feminism (he actually edited a women's magazine), socialism, and homosexuality would make him very politically correct if he were living today. His literary and art criticism are perhaps less fashionable, but of more importance; the ideas of British "Aesthetes" like Pater, Whistler, and Wilde, along with those of their cousins the Symbolists in France, laid the groundwork for all twentieth-century artistic theory. And of course, Wilde's comedies of manners, especially *The Importance of Being Earnest*, have influenced twentieth-century playwrights from Shaw, to Coward, to Stoppard.

The "gay nineties" were Wilde's defining decade. He wrote all his famous plays, and the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, between 1891 and 1895, the year of his trials and imprisonment. After that, he never again wrote for the stage; in fact, the two hits then running on the West End, *An Ideal Husband* and *Earnest*, were immediately withdrawn upon his conviction, and there were no more productions in England of any of his works during his lifetime. At the time of his death, he was destitute.

In the 1990s, a century after Wilde's triumphs and disaster, there have been sumptuous productions of all his comedies in London, one of which, *An Ideal Husband*, ran for some time on Broadway as well, where it won many awards. There have also been a flood of books about Wilde, plus a film and two plays. One of the plays, *Gross Indecency*, was so successful off-Broadway that the production has been playing around

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the country; oddly, I saw the show in New York with a replacement cast, then at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles with many of the original actors.

The full title of the play is *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*; it is a docudrama and courtroom drama rolled into one. The writer and director, Moisés Kaufman, noted that he was inspired by the didactic techniques of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre. Staging was simple, using a few pieces of furniture in front of drapes; lighting was stark. Actors stepped in and out of character, alternating between narrative and enactment. Every word of dialog was taken from documents—including trial transcripts, memoirs of people involved, and Wilde's own writings—with sources announced as a kind of verbal footnoting. The style of the play thus seemed to go directly against Wilde's own ideas about theatre, since Wilde espoused Pater's "art for art's sake," and was given to statements like "all art is quite useless." Yet Aestheticism and Epic Theatre are not so far apart as they might seem at first glance. Art for art's sake does not imply airy escapism; instead, art turns its back on life as a rebuke to it. Thus, *The Importance of Being Earnest* actually mentions every serious political issue of its day, from agricultural policy to home rule for Ireland, but the references are always flippant or sardonic. (When Gwendolyn complains that the country bores her to death, Cecily replies, "Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not?") Furthermore, Brecht's didacticism did not imply simple propagandizing; in fact, the ironic detachment that Brecht admired and copied from Shaw can be traced back to Wilde. I think Wilde would have liked *Gross Indecency*, because it turns its protagonist into a classically tragic, and hence aesthetic, figure. And Brecht would have liked it because, without preaching or self-righteousness, it makes the audience ponder the hypocrisy of our attitudes about sexuality.

The first of Wilde's three trials was initiated by Wilde himself, for libel. The Marquess of Queensbury, infuriated by Wilde's relationship with his son, Lord Alfred Douglas (or "Bosie"), had been harassing Wilde. He nearly broke up the premiere of *Earnest*, but was denied entry to the theatre at the last moment. Queensbury was an irascible eccentric, divorced from his wife and estranged from his children, who was active in the world of boxing, where he formulated the Queensbury Rules. After the incident at the theatre, he left his calling card at Wilde's club, writing on it "To Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite [*sic*]." Wilde felt he had no choice but to press charges for libel.

At first the trial went well for Wilde, but Queensbury, with his underworld connections via the world of boxing, was able to gather evidence that Wilde had consorted with male prostitutes. Wilde, testifying, fended off the accusations with his famous wit, until Queensbury's defense attorney asked if he had ever kissed a young acquaintance named Walter Grainger, to which Wilde airily replied, "Oh dear no. He was a peculiarly plain boy." Kaufman's play makes this the turning point; instead of getting a laugh, the response makes the court go silent.

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Missing the joke entirely, Wilde's listeners take him to mean that he would have kissed the fellow if he had been good-looking. In the end, Wilde's wit, his greatest asset, was his greatest weakness. Notorious for writing or uttering outrageous remarks that challenged society's deeply felt pieties, Wilde finally found an audience that understood the serious meaning beneath the banter.

Wilde was then forced to withdraw his case, and the tables were turned. He was tried under an 1885 law prohibiting "gross indecency" between men, a law so vague that it was known as "the blackmailer's charter," but which stayed on the books until 1967. Before the trial, Wilde had plenty of time to escape to France, but, dazed, failed to do so, once again participating in his own downfall. Interestingly, his first trial ended in a hung jury; Wilde had plenty of defenders, even after he was convicted at the second trial. On the other hand, his attackers were now ruthless, pushing for another trial when most prosecutors would have given up, and securing the most severe punishment possible. The judge who sentenced Wilde actually said it was the worst case he had ever tried, and regretted that the sentence could only be for two years at hard labor! In the court of history, that judge, Sir Alfred Wills, today seems the worst of his kind.

Gross Indecency is the best documentary play I have ever seen, partly because its story is so interesting and timely, partly because Kaufman's selection and editing of the documents was masterfully done. Not only Wilde's personality, but his ideas came through, along with all his strengths and weaknesses. Other characters also generally came through vividly—feckless Bosie, terrible-tempered Queensbury, and decent, open-minded Sir Edward Clarke, Wilde's attorney. The male whores were played as dreamy, beautiful figures, as idealized by Wilde, rather than the sleazy individuals they actually were; Kaufman had them perform in loose Victorian underwear, which actually began to look like ancient Greek chitons.

My only quarrel with Kaufman's otherwise deft, imaginative directing came at the beginning of the second act, where he reenacted a recent interview with Professor Marvin Taylor of N.Y.U. Although what Taylor had to say seems eminently reasonable and insightful when you read the interview—the gist of it is that Wilde did not think of himself as a homosexual, because the very idea of there being a special class of individuals with that orientation did not yet exist—Kaufman had both actors I saw in the role play Taylor as a pedantic fool. The audience laughed throughout the scene, but if they had noticed the content rather than the manner they would have been less amused and more enlightened.

The two casts I saw in the play were about equal in ability—or inability, in the case of their wretched English accents—except for Michael Emerson as Wilde in L.A., who outshone his rival, Edward Hibbert. Small, thin Emerson does not look remotely like tall, fat Wilde, yet he seemed possessed by his very spirit. Emerson spoke with a

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drawling English accent that may have been like Wilde's (listeners found his speech, learned at Oxford as a replacement for his native Irish accent, unusual), and had a delicate way of gesturing with his hands that recalled female characters in Peking Opera, or the sinuous grace of an Aubrey Beardsley drawing. Elegant, intellectual, amusing, passionate about art and literature, he embodied and revivified Aestheticism, so that when the judge refused even to give him the opportunity to speak after the conviction, it seemed a defeat for art.

Mark Ravenhill's new play, *Shopping and Fucking*, shocked London last season, and continues to jolt audiences worldwide. I saw it at the end of August at the Edinburgh Festival, then again in New York in February. The characters are scatterbrained *Lumpenproletariat*; themes include homosexuality, anal intercourse, drugs, sado-masochism, and mutilation. A few random stage directions will give you some idea of the world it depicts: "Mark vomits." "He pulls out a packet of cocaine." "Mark starts to lick Gary's arse." And yet there is a strange innocence about the whole thing; the characters have a loopy charm, and the dialog is some of the funniest I have heard in years. At one point, challenged to describe the most famous person he has ever had sex with, one of the men spins a yarn about an imaginary encounter with the late Princess Di (dressed in police uniform!) in a men's room, wickedly comical because it is so unlikely (if only for the gay sexual orientation of the storyteller), a totally outlandish concoction like the play itself as a whole. (Or should I say "hole," as in arse—, that part of the human anatomy that so fascinates these folks.)

The story concerns a London ménage à trois. Mark, a drug addict, has apparently bought a young man and woman, Robbie and Lulu, from a pimp at a supermarket, but since Mark is a confirmed liar, all his exposition may be pure fabrication. Mark is recently out of prison, and trying to avoid personal commitments, but he nonetheless takes up with a fourteen-year-old male prostitute named Gary. Meanwhile, Robbie and Lulu take up drug dealing, but Robbie, stoned, ends up giving away most of what he was supposed to sell. This naturally gets them in trouble with their supplier, a smarmy hypocrite out of Dickens named Brian; to reimburse him, Robbie and Lulu go into the phone sex business. Mark brings Gary home, where Robbie and Lulu help him enact Gary's sexual fantasy of being anally raped, but Lulu and Robbie balk at culminating the fantasy by thrusting a knife into Gary's anus. The scene ends before we learn whether Mark does it. In a final scene, Robbie, Lulu, and Mark deliver the phone sex proceeds to Brian, who generously allows them to keep it, a preposterous ending that is once again a signal that we are not to take what we see as social realism. These characters exist only in their own strange world. Charles Lamb once described Restoration Comedy as "a utopia of gallantry"; he maintained that we cannot judge its characters by the norms of our world, because those norms do not even

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exist in theirs. *Shopping and Fucking* might similarly be called a utopia of polymorphous perversity.

When the play opened in February in New York, all the local critics whom I respect—John Simon, John Lahr, Michael Feingold—despised it. When I saw the production, with an American cast, I understood why. Where the British actors had found a simple, understated style for the play, the Americans indulged in some of the most hysterical overacting I have ever seen. All were older than their British counterparts; indeed, the actor playing fourteen-year-old Gary (Torquil Campell) did not look a day under thirty-five. In Edinburgh, the characters seemed to have a genuine affection for one another, and a childlike sincerity. (Kate Ashfield as Lulu even sucked her thumb.) In New York, the cast snarled and raged at one another so outrageously that they destroyed not only relationships but comprehension.

In the script, the phone sex scene is hilarious from the start; having to carry on several sexy conversations at once is inherently funny, and the urgent stratagems required to keep them all going are worthy of the Marx Brothers. At one point, Lulu, a former drama student, desperate to come up with erotic material, slips into the "Gallop apace" speech from *Romeo and Juliet*! Ashfield in Edinburgh read the speech as a thousand aspiring actresses would do it, well-spoken and a bit too sincere, which made it all the funnier because of the inappropriate context. Jennifer Dundas Lowe read it in New York as if out to prove that Lulu was the worst actress ever to stride the boards, killing the humor; it was a classic case of two jokes canceling each other out. The whole scene had become chaotic; indeed, my companion was unaware that phone sex was what was going on.

Gemma Bodinetz directed the New York production with Max Stafford-Clark, who staged the original one. I take the co-direction to mean that Bodinetz stuck to the same basic blocking and business, with the same setting (by Julian McGowan), but otherwise was on her own. I cannot imagine anyone involved with the superb original production allowing such a mess to go on. The childlike quality of the original had become child*ish*, like something a naughty child might do or say in order to shock its parents. Ravenhill, a writer to watch, deserved better.

Despite a fascination with America in the early twentieth century, I never could get through E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*. With its endless cataloging of real names and events (but little true feeling for the period), its flippant prose style, and its formulaic central characters (many of which, like "Mother" and "Father," are not even given names), the novel seemed so mannered and smug that if it had a neck I could have wrung it.

In January a musical version of *Ragtime* arrived in New York at the new Ford Center for the Performing Arts on the amazingly resurrected 42nd Street. The plot of the musical, like that of the novel, concerns three families: well-to-do WASPs in New Rochelle, New York (these are the

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folks who are unnamed); their black servant and her husband and child; and a Jewish immigrant and his daughter. There are all kinds of random, peripheral incidents, including Father's unlikely trek to the North Pole with Admiral Peary, but the main story concerns the death of the servant, Sarah, at the hands of a racist mob. Her husband, Coalhouse Walker, Jr., a successful ragtime musician living in Harlem, goes berserk, starting a racial war against whites. He is joined by Mother's Younger Brother, who constructs explosives for terrorist bombings. When Coalhouse and his men are trapped in the Morgan Library (!), Father negotiates a surrender, but the police kill Coalhouse anyway, a betrayal that is so obvious that Coalhouse must be an idiot not to foresee it.

The whole silly story betrays Doctorow's lack of a sense of history. For one thing, there were no significant numbers of blacks in Harlem until the late teens. For another, the early twentieth century was hardly a period of black terrorism against whites, but the reverse, most notably by the Ku Klux Klan in the South, but also in racial rioting in the North. There were also political gun battles and bombings in the period, often involving anarchists, but these were part of desperate labor-management struggles (about which *Ragtime* says nothing) rather than of racial strife.

Nevertheless, good theatre can arise from second-rate material. The musical of *Ragtime*, with book by Terrence McNally, stays closer to the original than I would have liked; even some of the vile prose is delivered by the characters as narrative. With superb acting fleshing out the characters, however, and beautiful abstract settings (by Eugene Lee), costumes (Santo Loquasto), and lighting (Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer) bringing back the characters' bittersweet world, I found myself surprisingly moved. The images were lovely, haunting, and surreal; fragmentary settings and revelatory props (including a functional Model-T Ford) were enhanced by projections of flowing clouds, or period photographs. At one point we saw the characters dancing in silhouette against a giant, grainy, black-and-white photo of the Lower East Side, circa 1900. There seemed to be a strong influence here of Robert Wilson, the performance artist whose stage images are always mystically beautiful, though intellectually vacant.

The music for the show, composed by Stephen Flaherty, was not up to the level of the designs. You would think that a musical called *Ragtime*, with a principal character who is a ragtime pianist, would have a lot of ragtime music in it, but it turned out that only the title song was a rag—and not even always played as one. As in so many musicals these days, the score ended up sounding like something by Andrew Lloyd Webber, all recitative and no memorable tunes. Yet once again, the strong cast, under the gifted direction of Frank Galati, overcame the deficiencies, singing like angels and acting with great clarity and commitment. Most notable were Alex Strange as the son, Little Boy, a role that could have become insufferable but was far from it; Audra

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McDonald, who sang so magnificently in the recent *Master Class*, and was equally good here as the servant Sarah; and Brian Stokes Mitchell, who turned Coalhouse into a humane and tragic figure when he could have been a mere fanatic.

There are now three beautifully restored theatres on 42nd Street. The Ford Center is actually an amalgam of two former theatres-cum-porno-houses, the Lyric and Apollo. Combining the two has created the biggest theatre on Broadway (yet with perfect acoustics and sightlines), plus sumptuous lobbies. Next door to the Ford Center, the New Victory operates as a youth theatre. Across the street at the New Amsterdam, a splendiferous Art Nouveau theatre dating from 1903, Julie Taymor's puppet version of Walt Disney's *The Lion King* opened in November, and will probably run forever. The Ford Center and the New Amsterdam are generally listed in the press as Broadway houses, yet notice that when you get a program at either one it says *Showbill*, not *Playbill*. Both theatres are technically *off-off*-Broadway (though you would never know it from the prices), because the producers, Livent and Disney, feisty upstarts on the New York theatre scene, are *not* members of The League of American Theatres and Producers, preferring instead to negotiate their own contracts with the unions. Perhaps this will mean the end of the high salaries, featherbedding, and outmoded work rules that have been strangling theatre in New York for decades.

Thirty-three years ago, my wife and I were such fans of Eli Wallach's acting that we named our son after him. Wallach is now eighty-two, and I am still a fan. Despite his age, he was as good as ever playing the title role in Jeff Baron's *Visiting Mr. Green* eight times a week off-Broadway last winter.

The play is a workmanlike two-character comedy involving old Mr. Green, a Jewish widower, and a young man who nearly ran him down. Convicted of reckless driving, he is sentenced to visiting the old man once a week as community service. Since Mr. Green does not want the young man's services, and the young man would certainly rather not provide them, the stage is set for a forced confrontation that is intrinsically comic. There are serious developments, however. Mr. Green finds it difficult to accept the young man's homosexuality, not for the standard moral reasons, but because he sees it as a part of the decline of Judaism; "What Hitler couldn't do, you are doing." Discussion of this obsession leads to the revelation, rather late in the play, that Mr. Green had disowned his daughter years earlier, for marrying a gentile. Through the efforts of the young man, there is a reconciliation with her, who is knocking on the door as the curtain falls. (It would not do, these days, to have to pay for another actor.)

Like the other great American actors of his generation, Wallach had plenty of theatrical experience before going to Hollywood. He studied at the Actors Studio, starred on Broadway in plays by Tennessee Williams, and has continued to perform onstage from time to time,

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often with his wife Anne Jackson, a fine actress herself. As a result, Wallach knows how to project his voice in a theatre, how to time his reactions for an audience, and how to use exposition to vivify offstage characters (the dead wife), whom a movie would simply show. But he also has the intense eyes of a movie star, which he would use to nail the young man (nicely played by David Alan Basche) in his tracks. Pauses are usually the kiss of death onstage, unlike film, where they are often more telling than the dialog, but Wallach made them work again and again.

Loren Sherman designed a splendid *tranche de vie* setting of a Manhattan apartment; David Shire composed incidental music far superior to what one usually hears at an off-Broadway non-musical; Lonny Price directed capably. I eagerly await Eli Wallach's next stage appearance.

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BERT CARDULLO

Life and Nothing But

to the memory of my father

FROM FRANCE AND JAPAN, WE GET TWO FILMS ABOUT DEATH, or rather about the reaction of the living toward it. *Maborosi* is the first feature from the documentarian Hirokazu Kore-eda (with a screenplay adapted from Teru Miyamoto's novel [1978]), about a young woman's search to understand her husband's inexplicable suicide. This picture was photographed by Masao Nakabori, and the exquisiteness—as well as thematic point—of his cinematography recalls that of the great Kazuo Miyagawa, who shot a previous Japanese movie about suicide, *The Ballad of Orin* (1978), directed by Masahiro Shinoda. Through their cinematographers, Shinoda and Kore-eda look to the physical universe, the world of forests, oceans, mountains, and light, for an explanation, transmutation, or at least encompassing of what happens to people. In this both men are typically Japanese, as Shinoda himself has argued: "European films are based upon human psychology, . . . Japanese films upon *circumstance.* Japanese films are interested in what surrounds the human being."

Shinoda oversimplifies, of course, but the essential truth of his remark is proved by the aforementioned French picture about death. Its title is *Ponette,* and it was written and directed by Jacques Doillon, none of whose more than fifteen previous movies I have been able to see. Ponette is a four-year-old girl who has survived a car accident in which her mother was killed, and who struggles during the film to comprehend what death is and what it means, not only in relation to her mother but also to herself and the rest of her life. Thus the movie's perspective is humanly psychological, in Shinoda's terms, not geographically or spatially circumstantial. And, befitting its perspective, *Ponette* is either photographed from the little girl's point of view, even her precise eye-level (and edited by Jacqueline Fano with nearly a neglect for "continuity," so as to capture a child's indeterminate sense of time), or we see "objective" close-ups of her wracked, haunted face together with full shots that feature Ponette in conversation-communion with other people. In any event, rarely is her person excluded from the frame, which makes sense given the picture's intent to portray the emotional landscape of childhood. The French cinema has a long history of exceptional insight (sans sentimentality) into the minds and sensibilities of children, but no picture that I know, French or otherwise, has given

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the leading role to a child so young and surrounded her mostly with children of about the same age, more or less free of the intervention or mediation of adults. Victoire Thivisol, who plays Ponette, was cast when she was three-and-a-half years old, and completed shooting when she was four!

Our first view of Ponette aptly occurs in the film's first image: a medium close-up of this little girl in a hospital bed, compulsively sucking her thumb, the only part of her left forearm not in a cast after the wreck. Ponette's father is there by her side, but not for the purpose of sharing a good cry with his daughter or lamenting her helpless suffering. Indeed, he is surprisingly matter-of-fact about what has happened, while Ponette for her part remains expressionless. Even Philippe Sarde's score, for piano and violin, eschews the effusively maudlin here for the reticently melancholy, which it will do throughout the picture as music shares the soundtrack not only with dialogue but also with silence.

Abruptly, the scene shifts to a car in which Ponette's father is driving her to the scenic Rhône-Alps district of France, where the girl will live for a time with her Aunt Claire and two cousins roughly her own age, Matthias and Delphine. Just as abruptly, the father blames his wife's inveterately careless driving for the crackup that cost her life, despite Ponette's protest that the accident was not her mother's fault. Then he stops with his daughter at the crash-site, whose beautifully verdant and mountainous (but unitalicized, and therefore frequently unsunny) background is small comfort to the girl. The father's intention is clear, if perhaps ill-advised: to get Ponette quickly used to the idea of her mother's death, to make her accept it by recalling its circumstances and reiterating its irreversible facticity. To this end, he even has the girl attend her mother's open-casket wake at Aunt Claire's house. But Ponette has other ideas, and this will be her film, not her dad's; not the story of her father's life after his wife's death, but the story of a young daughter's living with her mother's absence. Accordingly, after saying goodbye to a tearful Ponette, Dad departs on business for Lyons, to be seen again only twice: once during a brief visit at about the movie's midway point and then in the final scene.

Lest the reader deduce that *Ponette* subsequently turns into a melodramatic narrative pitting innocent, feeling, and imaginative children against ill-tempered, stupid, and insensitive adults, rest assured that Doillon the screenwriter is careful to give his heroine at least one young playmate who cruelly taunts her with the accusation that it was Ponette's own meanness that caused her mother's death, and to provide another like the otherwise sympathetic and funny Matthias, who flatly insists to his cousin that "Dead people never come back. They can't wake up." For not only is Ponette inconsolable in her grief, she is nearly alone even among her peers in her stubborn notion-become-conviction that her mother might somehow return from the dead. After all, she asks as she is fed the basics of Christianity by her Aunt Claire, if Christ can come back from the grave, why can't her dearest *maman*? Why, indeed.

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Ponette begins attending nursery school with Matthias and Delphine after her father's second leave-taking for work in Lyons, and it is here that she meets the one child with whom she forges a spiritual bond, Ada. This girl introduces herself as a "child of God" or Sunday child, one who, according to European folklore, can see supernatural phenomena in addition to possessing the gift of prophecy; and it is she who coaches Ponette through her trials and encourages her in her prayers, which the latter offers up in the school's private chapel. She is ushered there by the understanding, unquestioning headmistress, Aurélie, who leaves this four-year-old to supplicate all by her earnest self in "God's room." For Ada has promised that if Ponette prays long and hard enough, Almighty God may allow her to talk to her mom in person, not just in her dreams. So desperate is the daughter to see her mother again, to embrace every child's image of love, goodness, and security, that she states her willingness to die in order to do so. But that won't be necessary, since Ada (Hebrew for beauty) and Aurélie (Latin for golden), along with Claire (Latin for luminous), prepare the way for what appears to be Ponette's sunny vision of her mother's return to earth. That way is also prepared by Caroline Champetier's camera, which, in response to Matthias' autumnal assertion that "Dead people never come back," for example, appears to give him the lie by circling around Ponette in imitation of the life cycle of extinction and renewal.

In the cemetery near the nursery school, where her mother is buried, the little girl one day places a sunflower on the grave under a blue sky illuminated by a blazing sun. Then Ponette begins digging her hands in the dirt in an attempt to unearth *maman*, at which point the woman appears in an epiphany that is something more than a vision, and that takes this otherwise realistic film into the realm of the mystical or transcendental. We know that we are expected to interpret this resurrection as a miracle because of a lost or misplaced red sweater that the mother returns to her daughter here, and that Ponette continues to wear after *maman* has vanished. Before disappearing, the latter explains to her child that she is in fact dead, but that such a death must not be allowed to interfere with Ponette's happiness. Though in tears, the little girl seems to understand and to be on her way to finding the inner peace, along with the saving grace, that will carry her through the rest of her own life. Ponette's father himself seems to have been touched by his wife's resurrection, of which Ponette informs him when he happens to return for the weekend immediately after his wife's otherworldly departure. For this lone parent does not accuse the child of fantasizing, and he is as astounded as we are by the tangible residue of the mother's mysterious visitation: the missing red sweater. As Ponette sits anew in her dad's moving car, the camera tellingly cranes up into leafless trees and the screen dissolves to celestially blinding white.

This film has been called "majestically absorbing," "wondrously moving," and "pristinely poignant" up until its miraculous or supernatural ending, which the secular humanists among us reflexively describe as

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"hokily sentimental." But it is possible to see Ponette's epiphany as the inevitable conclusion of the movie's divine comedy or childhood Calvary rather than as the artificial result of its earthly drama. Certainly a votary like myself has no trouble accepting the picture on these terms, as, let us say, a cinematic exemplum of the power of prayer. Nonbelievers, however, may be mystified by the Catholicity of Doillon's movie, preferring instead to see it as a pathetic instance of the human (childlike?) need for something otherworldly in which to believe. Doillon, naturally, is not the first director to confirm them in their prejudice. He joins the distinguished company of the late French Catholic director, Robert Bresson, and *Ponette* follows in the wake of such relatively recent, similarly disposed Gallic films as Alain Cavalier's *Thérèse* (1986), Maurice Pialat's *Under the Sun of Satan* (1987), and Éric Rohmer's *A Tale of Winter* (1992).

The real wonder of this film may not be in its story but in the acting of its child protagonist by Victoire Thivisol. One wonders what "performance" means to a girl so young, anyway; nonetheless, Doillon helped Thivisol over the threshold from play and fantasy into playing and fantasticating, into making imaginative use of the materials of her own young life, together with the lives of other youngsters who may actually have suffered the irrevocable loss of a parent. That Doillon needed, or thought he needed, a child psychiatrist (listed in the credits) in order to accomplish his goal, as opposed to a Catholic priest, is an ironic commentary not only on the godlessness of our age, or rather the elevation of science to the status of a divinity, but also on the need for films just such as *Ponette* to reinject a little sacred mystery into our lives.

Mystery comes into our lives through another path in Kore-eda's *Maborosi*, whose narrative is slender and—on its surface—simple. A young woman, Yumiko, lives in a small apartment in Osaka with her husband, a factory worker named Ikuo, and their three-month-old son, Yuichi. Everything seems to be fine until one day the husband commits suicide by walking into the path of an oncoming train. Yumiko cannot understand why, and the riddle of Ikuo's death haunts her. In the course of two to three years, she marries again with a matchmaker's assistance and moves to her new husband's home, in a remote fishing village where this erstwhile widower lives with his young daughter and elderly father. Yumiko's life seems to have resettled until she goes back to Osaka for her brother's wedding, where the inexplicability of her first husband's suicide envelops her again.

Now almost immobilized with incomprehension, even after she returns home to the fishing village, Yumiko listens quietly as her second husband tells her that his father once spoke of the existence of a strangely beckoning *maborosi* ("mirage"), a phosphorescent light or optical illusion that could lead sailors to their destruction. "It happens to all of us," the present husband says, by which he means that anyone—and in particular Ikuo—can give in to a *maborosi* of the landlocked kind, to a sudden impulse or demonic urge that results in

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self-destructive behavior. This doesn't really explain anything, of course, but it does have the virtue of retrospectively directing our attention to every *maborosi*—or, for my purposes, every filmed image sans the human form—of which this picture consists, for each of these is in reality no more than a configuration of light (benign, to be sure!) consisting of a series of frames designed to create the illusion of motion and continuity when viewed in sufficiently rapid succession. And there are many such shots, absent people—of the landscape, the sea, the city, the indoors—in this work.

Let's start with the sounds and shots of passing trains, which run throughout the scenes set in Osaka. In addition to foreshadowing early on the suicide of Ikuo, these "mystery trains" appear to suggest sheer movement or passage through an otherwise static cityscape, sheer linkage with the larger world outside—paradoxically, in this case, with the smaller world of the second husband's fishing village, to which Yumiko travels and from which she returns to Osaka by train. Kore-eda thus uses trains much the same way that his fellow Japanese Yasujiro Ozu did in a film like *Tokyo Story* (1953): as one representation of the physical world that surrounds his characters, sublimely indifferent to their needs and concerns, concerned only with its own inexorable continuation, its particular microcosmic contribution to the macrocosmic order.

Kore-eda's realistic shooting style, consisting of limited cutting within a scene or the frequent use of long takes, as well as the deployment of a camera that uses only natural light and rarely moves, in addition to eschewing the heat of the close-up for the repose of the full shot indoors and the long shot outdoors, for its part has a long tradition dating back to the brief flowering of a naturalistic cinema in southern Italy between 1913 and 1916. But his use of "cutaway" shots to the trains and his repeated interjection of "dead time"—beginning a scene on an empty room, street, piece of land, or stretch of water, before the characters enter the frame, or holding the camera on a location after the characters have departed—appear to come from Ozu.

"Dead time," like the cutaway, is itself the device of the realist filmmaker who seems compelled to remain in, or return to, the real world, the visual surface of a world momentarily bereft of his characters and their story. Documentarian that he has been, Kore-eda appears to want the fiction he has created to give up some of its screen-time to the actual or physical world in which it is taking place, to the one from which it was in fact drawn, for the purpose of drawing attention to the mystery and inviolability of that world. The cinematographer Nakabori's exclusive use of natural light underscores this universally enigmatic, impervious quality, for the screen, as a result, is often dimly illuminated. Furthermore, the gentle color scheme of Nakabori's palette is coolly overlaid with a tint of blue-green, even as the curve and flow of the actors' bodies stand in stylized, almost eerie contrast to the patent geometry of Japanese interiors.

Paradoxically, then, Nakabori and Kore-eda's cinematic style could be

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described not only as realistic but also as transcendental, a term that Paul Schrader once applied to the films of Japan's Ozu, France's Bresson, and Denmark's Carl Dreyer. According to Schrader, it is not necessarily the function of transcendental style to depict holy characters or pious feelings—that is, to deal explicitly with religion, as *Ponette* does; rather, the alternative, perhaps even proper, function of transcendental art is to express universal holiness or organic wholeness itself, which takes it beyond the realm of spiritual style or religious cinema as previously intimated. Thus the covertly or implicitly Christian pictures of Bresson and Dreyer express the transcendent to the same degree as their movies with overtly Christian themes; while the entire *oeuvre* of Ozu, a director clearly working in a non-Christian tradition, like Kore-eda, demonstrates the same depth of reverential insight as the work of his Western European counterparts. Simply put, transcendental style in the cinema seeks to maximize the mystery of earthly existence at the same time as it attempts to bring human beings as close to the ineffable, the invisible, or the unknowable as words, thoughts, sounds, and especially images can take them.

Transcendental style does this precisely through its redemption of physical reality: through its reveling, as in *Maborosi*, in the temporality or mundaneness of quotidian living at the expense of more dramatic actions such as murder, mayhem, rape, robbery, even simple altercation. In Kore-eda's film, for example, we see neither the suicide of the first husband nor its gory aftermath nor even the man's funeral; we don't even witness the marriage ceremony or the preceding period of courtship between Yumiko and her second husband, emotional events toward which the plot of a conventional narrative picture would build. Moreover, in this pictorial tone poem we are introduced to several characters, places, events, and sounds as we would be to recurring motifs in a piece of symphonic program music. That is, although we do in fact see or hear them in all their ordinariness in *Maborosi*, they are left simply to resonate, like purely formal orchestral notes, rather than otherwise being underscored, integrated, or elucidated. I'm thinking particularly of the small, doorless shack on a country road from which the barely visible Yumiko emerges to find and follow a stranger's funeral procession—a shack that serves as a bus stop and takes us back to an earlier scene in the fishing village during which we saw a group of anonymous women waiting there, only to get onto the bus that stopped and pass with it out of the frame.

Similarly, in juxtaposition with the commonplace activities of everyday life, we see the placid timelessness of the natural world in *Maborosi*—courtesy of "dead time" and the cutaway. And although that placid timelessness obviously cannot unravel the mystery of Ikuo's suicide, it can, like the recurring aural, scenic, incidental, and characterological motifs, encompass and even transmute such a traumatic occurrence through stasis—that is, by including it in a condition of balance among the various forces of an inscrutable universe whose ultimate questions

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can never be answered. Kore-eda leaves us with a memorable such balance at the end of the picture, with a kind of coda, by cutting away from Yumiko inside the house, looking out and remarking to her father-in-law merely on the warmth of the weather, to a shot of the fishing village's tranquil harbor, and then to a long take of Yumiko's second husband as he plays joyously outside with his daughter, the boy Yuichi, and the family dog. After this outdoor scene, Kore-eda cuts back to the interior of the house, but now no one or no thing is to be seen except the rustling of a curtain by the wind, to be followed abruptly by a concluding cut to black. The implication here is that Yumiko's disparity—the divorce, disunity, or unresolved tension between man and Nature (in a Christian picture, the alienation between man and God), between Yumiko's agonizing over Ikuo's suicide and the indifference of the physical world toward her grief as well as his motives—has been transcended in her quietly harmonious merger with the dailiness of daily existence.

As you might guess, a film such as this calls for extremely subtle acting, in part because the performer here is only one element in a picture or series of moving pictures. This is literally true of all movies, of course (except the abstract cinema of the avant-garde), but it's truer in *Maborosi* than most. In Kore-eda's film, the actors—Makiko Esumi, Takashi Naitoh, and Tadanobu Asano in the roles of Yumiko, Ikuo, and the second husband—are used almost as balletic figures, moving slowly through a terrain that itself seems to be a kind of character. Their job is not to emote in grief, sympathy, or anger and thus place the focus on themselves, but rather to underplay their characters so as to make aesthetic room for, as well as make themselves psychically accessible to, what surrounds and even transcends them. Speaking of underplaying, Chen Ming-Chang's score, mostly for piano, not only is sparingly used, it also underplays the emotion of any moment or scene it accompanies.

In the course of *Maborosi*'s 110 minutes, Yumiko does not miraculously get to see her first husband again, though she may dream of him, nor does she even get to fathom his motives for killing himself. In this regard her experience is distinctly different from that of Ponette, who knows why her mother died and who is able, through prayer, to will *maman* ever-so-briefly back to existence. I won't say that the difference between the experiences of these respective main characters is the difference between an adult's and a child's vision of the world. But I will say that this difference is one of world view: Yumiko looks finally to circumstances, to her surroundings, to bring her own deadened spirit back to life, whereas Ponette looks almost from the start to the God within herself to invoke her mother's risen spirit. The Japanese film resoundingly succeeds at placing its heroine squarely in the world, whereas the French one need hardly struggle to drive its protagonist decidedly back into herself.

Put another way, the Asian work of art looks out, as Yumiko herself does at the end of *Maborosi* when she comments to her father-in-law

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about the weather; the European artwork peers within, like Ponette in the final scene when, ensconced inside her father's departing automobile, she twice pronounces in quick succession *maman*'s psychological assessment that *fille* ought to stop complaining and be content with her fortune. In Doillon's movie, then, the emphasis is on the self and soul-salvation, while in Kore-eda's it's on otherness and natural communion. Together they paint as unified a picture of the material world, and the place of the human spirit within it, as one might wish to find, or, alternatively, as stark a contrast between Christian, original consciousness and non-Christian, primeval congruousness as one could hope to imagine.

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HAROLD FROMM

David Gelernter, Aesthetic Misfit?

DAVID GELERNTER, A DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF COMPUTER SCIENCE at Yale, was horribly damaged by a letter bomb from Ted Kaczynski in 1993. But as deranged as that act may appear, he does not believe the Unabomber to be insane. For Gelernter, he's worse than insane: he's an embodiment of evil. Perhaps one could refer to Kaczynski as "demented," using the word metaphorically for a condition involving a history of psychological shortcomings, personal obsessions, an inability to read society and its values with insight and sensitivity, an affective deficiency, a failure of imagination and human sympathy—all of which may come off as looniness but could plausibly be judged as evil, because Kaczynski *knew* what he was doing. As for the Unabomber's Manifesto, Gelernter chooses to describe it as a case of "sane stupidity," a characterization that could as well be applied to some of the leftist professors Kaczynski despises, with their pie-in-the-sky political polemics and isolation from mundane life.

Kaczynski's misreading of Gelernter is a world class case of inability to distinguish your friends from your enemies. Kaczynski's Nietzschean excoriation of leftists as weak, pale, resentful, self-doubting priestly types who wield their anti-vitalist guilt as a weapon against the aristocratic strong (a guilt that today takes the form of political correctness directed against bourgeois satisfactions) finds its milder counterpart in *Drawing Life*'s[1] distaste for intellectuals, their attacks on bourgeois institutions, and their use of victimology as a guilt-inducing bludgeon against "traditional" lifestyles. Nor can Gelernter be seen as the sort of self-perpetuating technocrat who mindlessly pursues a dehumanizing agenda of mechanization of the kind Kaczynski detests. As a pianist, painter, imaginative writer, and art critic, Gelernter can say, "I am rotten at everything that is not art; having succeeded in computer science only by forcing software into a strictly aesthetic mold, making it a design issue like architecture or painting. I hate machines except insofar as they are beautiful" (a position he takes up more thoroughly in *Machine Beauty*[2]).

The Unabomber's Manifesto, which begins impressively enough in its analysis of the Left but which becomes increasingly confused, tentative, badly written, and "demented" (a kind of third-rate Frantz Fanonism), is

[1] DRAWING LIFE: Surviving the Unabomber, by *David Gelernter*. The Free Press. $21.00.
[2] MACHINE BEAUTY: Elegance and the Heart of Technology, by *David Gelernter*. Basic Books. $20.00.

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ambiguous on the subject of art. Although Kaczynski seems sympathetic to the arts, he regards almost every human interest after the Industrial Revolution as a "surrogate" activity, that is, a manufactured pursuit brought about by a leisured technological society that has eliminated all the "real goals" (to use his term) of mankind, forcing people to invent distractions like sports, art, TV, scientific curiosity, scholarship, in order to whittle away the time that used to be spent on the ordeal of survival. Like the deep ecologists he resembles, Kaczynski and his thinking are beclouded by a romance with primitive decentralized societies, "unspoiled" wilderness, and an idyllic vision of human life before farming, urbanization, and bureaucratic institutions resulted in a supposed loss of autonomy and "freedom." What this freedom actually consisted of besides the short, brutish and nasty luxury of dying at twenty in a struggle against disease, hunger, and predators he is never able to say. For him, the life of primitive man seems to have consisted in tiptoeing through the tulips.

In the final analysis, what Kaczynski addresses as surrogate activities are the very ones that have come to represent human "freedom" in the philosophic tradition extending from Plato through the Romantics: the pursuit of "purposeless" aesthetic and intellectual gratifications. From this latter point of view, a truly *human* life began only when mankind was freed from the daily struggle to stay alive and could afford to turn its faculties toward such "non-instrumental" preoccupations as truth, beauty and, to use Schiller's term, "play." It is this aesthetic realm that Gelernter principally inhabits, but Kaczynski (confused about his friends, enemies, and goals) wants literally to bomb us all back into the "real life" of the Stone Age, like the generals who planned to save Vietnam by destroying it. As the Unabomber's Manifesto moves on apace, sounding increasingly repetitious and dazed, one is struck by Kaczynski's affinity with Hitler, Stalin, and other ruthless utopians willing to destroy millions of people in order to restore human dignity, "freedom," and "real" goals to the high-minded residue. But when civilization is destroyed there isn't much of anything left besides the low-minded struggle for existence.

Gelernter's story is surprisingly free of self-pity, even though the damage he suffered impaired or destroyed his ability to play the piano, to paint and draw, to write by hand or computer, and, for a while, to conduct his classes at Yale (although he has experienced some limited success in being patched together again). Given the long period of rehabilitation and the problems in perfecting various prostheses, his prolificity and lack of morbidity as a writer since 1993 can only be regarded as remarkable.

The question Gelernter's dark experience raises at the start of *Drawing Life*—his interrogation (as it were) of the late twentieth century—is "What made crime get so much worse as life got so much better?" His generalized reply is that "the blast that injured me was a reenactment of a far bigger one a generation earlier, which destroyed

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something basic in this society that has yet to be repaired." The fact that his hand, eye, chest and more will never return to their former state does not prevent him from feeling recovered, however, feeling in some ways "better than before." (He retains an abundance of good humor: "It is hard to wash your hands when you are down to only one.") He is optimistic enough to believe that if *he* can recover, America can recover as well. Still, the sense of a rift, a "blast," in American history after World War II haunts him throughout *Drawing Life* even though, only two years earlier, he had already explored this perception at great length in a fictionalized account[3] of the New York World's Fair of 1939. In that epochal exhibition he saw a last gasp of optimism about the benefits of technology as experienced and enjoyed by a population of visitors who still believed in a phenomenon called America, who identified themselves as part of it, and who felt it was a real thing, diverse but unified by a quasi-religious essence. He describes at length the politeness, respect for order, formal clothing, family dinner rituals, and insouciance about crime that characterized all of the social classes in attendance, aspects of an "ought" culture of rules rather than a "want" culture of desires. Marveling that dangerous explosives could be left unguarded at one of the exhibits without any fear of theft or terrorism, he laments the gradual erosion, in the years that followed, of social order, an order supported by America's civil religion: its faith in constitutional democracy, its willingness to act in the public interest. He attributes this transformation to the actual realization by 1970 of the utopian promises made by the Fair in 1939, of a higher standard of living, a reduction or cure of diseases, and a general upgrading of human life. "We have reached the promised land in the Biblical sense, not where *everyone* but where vast numbers of 'ordinary' people have the means to be happy." Unfortunately, he adds, "Utopia is a costly thing to achieve. . . . Because a religion that has seen its promises realized is bound to crack apart."

Gelernter sees the architecture and technology of the thirties as the high point in modern design, a period in which functionality and beauty were unashamedly conjoined (a jointure about which he has much to say in *Machine Beauty*) to produce an effect he does not hesitate to call "spiritual." This inspiriting fusion of the aesthetic with the instrumental is what draws him back to the prewar period as a model for technological society. Cognizant though he is about the flaws and inequities of that society (whose imperfect legacies, at present, are the only aspects of America that most of his academic colleagues care to acknowledge, as they sit at their Pentium II's sipping microbrewed beer), his overall assessment remains nevertheless upbeat, though perhaps it is fair to say that the closing pages about the glories of New York in the thirties are suffused with a nostalgia that finally seems overblown.

The crux of Gelernter's case against contemporary social morality is

[3] David Gelernter, *1939: The Lost World of the Fair* (New York, 1995).

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our aversion to being "judgmental." The "Canonical American" of the thirties had stronger opinions than ours about right and wrong, opinions that multiplicity and identity politics no longer permit, because negative judgments (God forbid!) are *ex*clusive and, in any case, the Canonical American is dead. (Remember what the New York subways looked like in the seventies and eighties when it was philistine to be judgmental about "graffiti artists"?) Even the press's habit of calling the Unabomber "mad" struck Gelernter as an evasion of moral judgment, for if the bomber is mad he can't be held responsible. But how mad could a person be, he wonders, who could design letter bombs, write manifestoes, and evade capture for years? To avoid treating people as evil is to invite an anything-goes society. What if it turns out that an anything-goes society is no society at all? Is the primal stew?

Gelernter tries to provide a genealogy of postwar anti-judgmentalism, starting with the creative violence cried up by Norman Mailer's "The White Negro" in 1957, but his main objects of criticism are the intellectuals and academics who later came to dominate public opinion as an "elite" class empowered by the growth of university education after the war. Although writers, artists, and intellectuals have long been voices of rebellion, subversion, sexual freedom, anti-religion, and anti-government, it was not until the seventies (when public policy became academicized) that society began to act out, as it were, the potentially disintegrative ethos of doing your own thing, generating the narcissistic, anti-social "blast" that fueled the solipsism of the Unabomber mentality. (It's ironic to note that much, if not most, of what passes for popular self-expression at present is little more than a corporate brainwashing of the consumer society—as when New York City elementary students protest that adopting school uniforms would rob them of "self-expression," that is, of buying the clothing they've been trained to covet by TV.) The old business elite was more in tune with its constituents, whereas the new intellectual elite hates everything bourgeois and derides basic institutions of society that are still meaningful to the masses. Because its doctrine of tolerance disapproves of distinctions like all-male schools, it practices a homogenization that erodes the maintenance of bona fide group and individual identities. Identity politics, far from preserving deep-rooted distinctions, forces people to endorse stereotypical or even repugnant group characteristics, intimidating individuals into miming roles they are actually unhappy to play.

Gelernter associates the civil rights movement of the fifties and sixties with the genesis of this "tolerance" as the modern intellectual's cardinal virtue. "The civil rights story built on themes that had long attracted intellectuals—a morally gross majority, an oppressed minority struggling for justice. It all made sense. Yet the religion raised up on this basis did not." For while other absolutes, like truth, have been cast aside by intellectuals as social constructs, tolerance, or anti-judgmentalism, has not. To judge someone as bad, inferior, or disabled is to turn him into a victim, a newly protected class that acquires virtue by being disparaged.

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Gelernter protests when the newspaper reports of his injuries portray *him* as a victim. He doesn't want to be extolled for his disabilities. Distaste for the "non-judgmental" programs of intellectuals is what lies behind his curious gravitation into computer science, because "technology is the least academic field." As for those presumably tolerant academics, "Maybe I forgot to mention that intellectuals hate to be judgmental except if you disagree with them."

While tolerance, he writes, has improved the social mobility of blacks, Jews, women and made the lives of more Americans middle class, it has eroded social structures and human community as well as the safety of big cities like New York. Blacks have bifurcated into the rich and the underclass, Jews have been assimilated but are losing their ethnicity, women have become more powerful in the global economy but defensive about domesticity. The splintering of groups into smaller and smaller units has ushered in a new kind of jungle mentality, propped up by gated communities and home/car security systems. Gelernter is right about the transformation of New York City. As a ten-year-old living in Brooklyn I rode the subways alone into Manhattan without any special anxiety on my parents' part or my own. Today, as a visitor, I maintain an uneasy vigilance underground and in the late evening take taxis (which have their own problems), yet I'm not a paranoid type.

Gelernter, however, is willing to confess to some uncertainty about the validity of his nostalgia for the security and community of the late thirties, even as he is imbued with a sense of the precariousness of civilized life in the U.S. of the nineties, a time when sending letter bombs and blowing up Federal Buildings have become new forms of self-expression. (I don't see him ever again examining his mail without some twinge of anxiety.) What's worse, I would add, after the O.J. Simpson trial, even the legal system looks corrupted by tolerance, identity politics, and anti- (or compensatory) judgmentalism. But about tolerance too Gelernter is divided: "My claim about the intellectuals taking over is complicated also. The moral world they have built, in which tolerance is the only unquestioned good, is wrong and unacceptable. But that doesn't alter the rightness of tolerance itself."

This dividedness grows throughout the book: Gelernter is highly critical of the press but admires particular journalists. He thinks the fabric of America as a nation is rotting away but he likes Americans as people and feels in many ways we are better off today than in the thirties. Though he approves of the advances made by women and blacks, he's far from happy with the relations between the sexes or between parents and children. He thinks society is better off "if mothers stay home and rear their children" (because the average working mother is not the director of a university press but "sits at her desk in a big noisy room with a hundred other women at some insurance company in Peoria, and worries about her children"), yet he doesn't regard himself as a right-wing extremist even as he concedes that a politician's career would be finished if he ever made such a remark in public. He's an academic

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who distrusts intellectuals and a computer scientist who is at heart an aesthete critical of technology's self-perpetuating momentum. Indeed, the thesis of his earlier book, *The Muse in the Machine: Computerizing the Poetry of Human Thought*[4] is that what passes today for artificial intelligence is a sham because all human intelligence starts in the body and is meaningless without reference to its psycho-biological, its sensual origins, whereas today's computer intelligence is strictly "high focus" ratiocination that lacks the dreamy, primitive, childlike, "inspired" quality of "low focus" intuition, an essential component of human thought. However high focus his professional interests may be, Gelernter's prose is conversational, racy, jokey (sometimes to a fault), loaded with concretions, and his everyday being takes place in the sensuous world of visual objects, music, emotions, love of family, Judaic ethnicity.

Gelernter's critique of feminism has a surprising twist: feminists "have helped create a utopia for loutish men," with abortion-on-whim, working wives, daycare, easy divorce. And now, easier-than-ever one night stands. "This is plain old ordinary precivilized male behavior." The feminists, he adds, routinely attack women who sacrifice their careers for family life. "Leading feminists cast women in the black victim role, men as the bigoted white oppressors." "Whether a stripper or a housewife gets more respect is hard to say, but if she is unmarried and supporting an illegitimate child, the stripper wins, no contest." It's not hard to see where all this is coming from: Gelernter is a domestic-oriented happily married man who loves his children and is a husband and father through and through. Though not religious, his sensibility is saturated with the blood-is-thicker-than-water loyalties of Old Testament narratives. Is love a bad thing in the sex-sodden nineties of the global economy, where money and scoring seem to be the only values disseminated on TV?

In preferring the "low-church" non-intellectual thinkers and writers of the prewar period—E.B. White, Joseph Mitchell, Stuart Davis, A.J. Liebling, Edward Hopper, Harold Ross's *New Yorker*—over today's "high-church" academic intellectuals, Gelernter underscores his esteem for thinkers who related to the public at large rather than to splintered and specialized audiences and who fed into a general culture that sustained the "Canonical American," fostering community and national identity. Lamenting the disappearance of actors like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, the devaluation of "good writing" by the academic intelligentsia (with all their "he-ing and she-ing and related stuff"), and the disintegration altogether of the "low-church" ethos, he confesses that when it's all toted up, "I'm a misfit from any angle." The low church collapsed when the time arrived for him to join—and he "signed up (so to speak) with the conservative intellectuals instead."

[4] New York, 1994.

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But in some respects I am not one of them—being, in some respects, not an intellectual at all. I would sell out their entire economic program—would double taxes, quintuple government spending—if it would buy me a modicum of national support for a politics-free English language. When the language goes down the drain, you lose everything. I would give up the White House for a generation for a major national newspaper that was dedicated to good writing and nonideological reporting, covered art in depth from the standpoint of art and not politics, didn't confuse "objectivity" with evenhandedness as between good and evil. Much as I admire conservative intellectuals, I think they are too willing to address politicians and each other instead of the public. And they care far more about politics, government and economics than I ever could manage to.

Drawing Life concludes with an almost biblical paean to the warmth of domesticity, the beauty of culture and morality, the use of the past as a source of insight and advantage in the present, and the possibility of transforming loss and misfortune into awareness of our subterranean connection with other people, even those you don't like. "Life is a stubborn return from sorrow again and again." So in the end, for Gelernter, "things have come out all right."

In a backlash during the last few years, books, articles, and op-eds have begun to pour out their hostilities toward politicized academia, toward the misfirings of feminism, the erosion of literacy (a by-product of non-judgmental grade inflation, as the *Times* recently front-paged it), the loss of community, the denigration of family life, the sordidness of popular culture as marketed by TV, etc., etc. What has David Gelernter got to say that we haven't now heard over and over again? What, if anything, is his distinction as a social critic beyond his encounter with the Unabomber? Is this just another tiresome voice of nostalgia and retrograde conservatism?

I don't think so. To begin with, as a cutting edge computer scientist, he is deeply involved with futuristic technology that changes forever the ethos of human life, making a return to "traditional values" impossible. At the same time, he is principally an art-lover who is obsessed with the aesthetics of technology and everything else. At the end of *Machine Beauty* he sings a song of praise to a once-cheap and commonplace plastic Emerson table radio from 1938 that he appreciates as a model of aesthetic technology: "It radiates such intense vibrant energy it could knock a person over." He thinks we are capable of creating products today that are equally beautiful. Though he loves old movies, old writers, old TV comedy, old family values, old pop music as well as (old) Beethoven quartets, and though he thinks American life would be greatly improved if TV were to disappear overnight, there's little evidence in his books that he is anything but a citizen of the contemporary world, a world that, in the final analysis, he critically accepts. While lamenting the philistine and ignorant products of American

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education and the politico-consumerist orientation of humanist professors insensitive to the aesthetic character of the arts they teach, he thinks that a reformed art, literary, and aesthetic education would contribute toward what I would call a re-humanization (as opposed to the rationalized commodification) of contemporary life.

The basis of this humanization, as seen in Gelernter's various books and preeminently in Gelernter himself as a person, is the human body, the ultimate source of emotion and thought. This marks a substantial departure from the wearisome kvetchings of garden variety conservatives and neoconservatives. For me, most of Gelernter's "conservatism" comes from the bodily character of his thinking and sensibility, as opposed to the spurious divine sanctions and stale, foundationless absolutes of many postmodern conservatives—who believe you can make a conscienceless killing in the global economy while living the Ozzie and Harriet family life that the global economy destroys. This bodyness in Gelernter is apparent not just in his frequently expressed feelings of connectedness to his sons, wife, and ethnic Judaism, his deep sense of being a father and husband, his emotional intensity as a person, or his sensuous involvement in the arts. It animates as well the unusually concrete quality of his writing, which is filled with physicalized references to people, events, movies, literature, music, the Bible—a writing minimally abstract, free of academic mannerisms and cult expressions. His conservatism has a primal, rooted quality derived from the instinctual bases of human life, from blood ties and a disposition to nurturing. His anger toward the Unabomber (an emotion somewhat unfashionable amidst today's phony benevolence), his optimistic, life-oriented, unvictimlike recovery from the damage inflicted upon him, and his distrust of the cerebrations and utopias of intellectuals convey a survivalist persona that acknowledges its physical origins. In understanding human experience as both enabled and circumscribed by the imperatives of the body, he is less impressed than radical intellectuals with the freewheeling qualities of "man's unconquerable mind," for all his appreciation of humankind's astonishing inventiveness. And after being partially blown asunder by an explosion from hell, he seems to have felt an intensified sense of the materiality of all things, himself included. As an academic computer scientist Gelernter may well be a misfit, but as a person living a life in civil society he looks like a pretty good fit to me.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Ford Once More

> But master, mammoth mumbler, tell me why
> the bales of your left-over novels buy
> less than a bandage for your gouty foot.

ROBERT LOWELL'S QUESTION TO THE NOVELIST (in his poem "Ford Madox Ford") has never quite been answered, but Max Saunders' massive two-volume biography tells Ford's story as definitively as any "definitive" biography is likely to.[1] There is no point in complaining about its length or asking whether Ford, man and writer, is worth 1400 pages on his life and work. Almost no one is likely to read Mr. Saunders from covers to covers; but then, who besides professional Ford scholars has read through, let alone remembers details of, the eighty-some volumes that constitute his contribution to literature: novels, memoirs, biographies, poems, political and social argument, children's books—you name it. This reader's attempt over the past few months to put himself more fully in the Fordian picture is representatively imperfect: in front of me on the desk are various volumes at various stages of incompletion—from *The Rash Act* to *The English Novel* to *New York Essays* to *Henry James* to *The New Humpty-Dumpty* to *England and the English.* What opinions, oh reader who admires *The Good Soldier,* do you have about any of the above titles? Some years back Auberon, son of Evelyn, Waugh declared, reviewing what he called smartly "an idiotic little book" of mine in which I had praised Wyndham Lewis' novels, that my writing on Lewis was "incomprehensible" since "none of us has read him." Ford, whose cumulative output exceeded even Lewis', presents, to Auberon and I suspect to others, a similar challenge—or threat. Sondra Stang's now out-of-print *Ford Madox Ford Reader* (1986) was a gallant but hopeless attempt to represent the writer by excerpting bits from unfamiliar novels and other prose works; but the "mammoth mumbler" remained, in vast stretches of his writings, still inaudible.

There have been a number of biographies of Ford, beginning with Arthur Mizener's attempt to separate fact from fiction in Ford's statements and claims. More recently, Alan Judd produced a highly readable and deft one-volume account that presented the life gracefully but didn't have much new to say about the art. Saunders has much to say about every aspect of Ford and interrupts his narrative of the career in

[1] FORD MADOX FORD, A Dual Life, by *Max Saunders.* Vol. I: The World Before the War, $55.00; Vol II: The After War World, $49.95. Oxford University Press.

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order to provide lengthy critical excursions into major and not-so-major books: fifty-eight tightly packed pages on *The Good Soldier*; eighty-four on *Parade's End*; thirty pages on Ford's autobiographical writings. These excursions are always intelligent, strongly and minutely argued, and quite difficult to read or at least to read well, since that necessitates having the books in question very much to the front of your mind. For most readers only *The Good Soldier* is likely to be available in such a way. Saunders is also a passionate advocate, losing no chance to defend Ford by explaining how others have misunderstood and misinterpreted him. He also finds much of interest, even of artistic success, in the "unread" novels Ford turned out: *Mr. Apollo*, *A Call*, and *Ladies Whose Bright Eyes*, from the prewar Ford Madox Hueffer Years; *The Rash Act*, *Henry for Hugh*, and *Vive Le Roy* (his final novel) from the postwar years in which Hueffer became Ford. With the best of effort and good will, I am unable to share his enthusiasm, while recognizing—as one once enthusiastic about unread Wyndham Lewis novels—how a biographer and critic may be carried by his subject into responses that others, more detached, simply can't share.

The biography is subtitled "A Dual Life," and it would be less than useful to catalog the many ways and contexts in which Saunders explores Ford's dualities, beginning with the inescapable fact that in 1919, with a raft of books, two "wives" (his first and only real one, Elsie Martindale, refused to divorce him so he could marry Violet Hunt), and with shattering service in the Great War behind him, he changed his last name, by deed poll, from Hueffer to Ford. The second "half" of his life has its own symmetry: two more "wives," Stella Bowen and Janice Biala, plus affairs and romances; another raft of books; increasing time spent away from England, first in France, then America; gradual metamorphosis into the persona he liked to call "an old man mad about writing." That "mad" has of course a dual sense signifying Ford's deeply-held conviction that to write, or at least to read, imaginative literature was the greatest, perhaps the only great thing to do in one's life. But there is also the sense, felt by some of his friends and not a few of his enemies, that Ford was something like "mad," unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood, fiction and reality. Of course mixing up these categories, "deconstructing" them, is exactly what Ford thought was the impressionist writer's task. His 1924 memoir of Conrad he termed a novel; his books of sociological impressionism all aspired to and partly achieved the condition of fiction, of poetry; and his bona fide novels often frustrate and madden the reader through their devious, extravagant ways of *not* getting on with "story," of not behaving as if fiction were an imitation of an action with a beginning, middle, and end. English fiction, rather than exhibiting form and technique in the service of art, was composed largely of what Ford called "nuvvles," fat books full of plots and characters—written by Fielding, Thackeray, Dickens, the Brontës, George Eliot—for most of which Ford had no enthusiasm at all.

Saunders goes to great pains, especially by way of arguing with his

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predecessor Mizener—who took Ford to task for distorting and subverting what really happened—that Ford's way of transforming literal truth (granted, a slippery notion) into something more congenial to his imagination, was a playful and complicated kind of wit. But when all is said and done, what does one do with, say, the claims made by sentences like these from a letter Ford wrote to Herbert Read in 1920:

> You are unjust, rather, to Conrad. . . . He has done an immense deal for the Nuvvle in England—not so much as I, no doubt, but then that was not my job, and he is of the generation before mine. I learned all I know of Literature from Conrad—and England has learned all it knows of Literature from me. . . . I do not mean to say that Conrad did not learn a great deal from me when we got going; I daresay he learned more actual stuff of me than I of him. . . . But, but for him, I should have been a continuation of *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*—and think of the loss that would have been to you young things . . . and think what English literature would be without Conrad and James. . . . There would be nothing.

(The ellipses, by the way, are Ford's own, one of his shiftier habits.) Consider what these sentences "say": that Conrad has done an immense deal for English fiction, though not so much as Ford; that Ford learned everything he knew about Literature from him (though Conrad really learned more "actual stuff" from Ford); that without Conrad and James—and surely, it is implied, Ford Madox Ford—English literature would be nothing. So much for whatever Great Tradition you thought was there. I enjoyed this letter to Read and its unapologetic clearing of the decks, but thought again of lines from Robert Lowell's poem: "Fiction, I'm selling short / the lies that made the great your equals." I presume that Saunders would say about this letter (he doesn't discuss it) that it is another example of how literary claims, like Ford's claims or beliefs in politics or religion, present attitudes that are impressionist: "illuminative exaggerations, unrealistic renderings of unrealistic positions." But they don't inevitably illuminate the subject; rather the subject becomes, yet once more, the indefatigable, irrepressible performance that is Ford Madox Ford, an important element in that performance being braggadocio. Allen Tate put it perfectly when he wrote that Ford's best biographer, when he came along (and now Mr. Saunders has come along), "will understand at the outset that Ford himself must be approached as a character in a novel, and that a novel by Ford."

I can't recall any biography of a writer in which so much space is devoted, so intensely, to rendering a critical description and judgment of individual works. Martin Stannard's two-volume biography of Waugh has much relevant and sensitive commentary on the books, but nothing comparable to Saunders'. By way of suggesting its scale, the eighty-four pages in the second volume devoted to Ford's tetralogy, *Parade's End*, at 700 words on a large page, add up to roughly 60,000 words, the size of

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a substantial critical monograph. Nor is Saunders' discussion conducted through leisurely chronological retelling of what happens in the four novels; instead the discussion is topical, grouped under three large heads—Impressionism and Authority, Psychology, and Writing—each head then subdivided into categories like Political Views, Confession, Values, The Father, Metaphor, and many others. Questions of "doubling," of paranoia, of male intimacy, are explored in relation to the tetralogy, with a fullness that is, to say the least, challenging. For example, the section on paranoia contains the following sentence: "The real 'problem' in discussing Ford in relation to paranoia turns on six judgements," after which Saunders spells out each of the six. This may suggest something of the architectonic nature of the discussion, also why any reader except the most undaunted might well at least breathe a sigh before plunging on.

Saunders is especially illuminating with respect to the tetralogy's final volume *The Last Post* (he refers to it by its English title, *Last Post*), certainly the least read of the four novels, in part because, in his Bodley Head edition of some years back, Graham Greene controversially chose to omit it. (Ford seems to have been of two minds about whether he wanted it as part of the whole work.) *The Last Post* is a very hard novel, also a surprising one in that the saga's hero, Christopher Tietjens, the war having concluded (the previous volume, *A Man Could Stand Up,* ends with Armistice Day) is absent from the book until its very end. Instead we get a series of monologues from his brother Mark, who is dying, from Mark's French wife, Mary Léonie, from Christopher's wife and nemesis, Sylvia, from his mistress and love, Valentine Wannop, and others. It takes unremitting attention, even more so than do *No More Parades* and *A Man Could Stand Up,* which are largely conducted within Christopher's head, to know where at any moment you are in *The Last Post.* Saunders quotes Dorothy Parker, whom I had no idea had written about Ford, as saying that his style in *The Last Post* "here becomes so tortuous that he writes almost as if he were parodying himself," and that the long interior monologues constitute "grave hardships for the reader." Quite right, though Parker finally found the book worth its difficulties and responded to its "vastly stirring quality." Saunders speaks most originally about *The Last Post* in relation to its predecessors, noting that it looks more like a romance—a word that reverberates through Ford's career, his major co-product with Conrad being their unreadable novel *Romance*—and unlike the "ironic modernism of Joyce, Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis." This temperamental and formal difference may explain, or corroborate, the sense that, though he doesn't share Pound's simplified politics, it is with Pound that Ford shares most important affinities. (Pound's early study of the troubadors was of course titled *The Spirit of Romance.*)

Reviewing *The Last Post* when it was published, the novelist L. P. Hartley shrewdly called Ford "as mannered a writer as Meredith" and added that, as with Meredith, "he rejoices in his manner." As one whose

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struggles with Meredith are remembered unhappily (ah, those graduate school days of pushing through *The Egoist*!) but who has just reread *Parade's End*, mainly with satisfaction, I'm sure Hartley puts the emphasis where it should be put. Ford remarked someplace that no Englishman ever finishes a sentence; thus the ellipsis is of crucial importance in his writing, fiction or not, and is instrumental in creating a highly mannered page. Especially this is the case in *No More Parades* and *A Man Could Stand Up*—where Tietjens' consciousness is so much at the center of things, roaming and swooping, concluding and not concluding. Hartley's description of *The Last Post* suits the tetralogy as a whole: "It moves with the *tempi* of life, sometimes tediously slow, sometimes at break-neck speed. It is full of complicated issues, of pure and base motives, of noble endeavours and unhappy outcomes, all bewilderingly mixed—all viewed partially and fleetingly from a hundred angles. It has the richness and the confusion and the profusion of life." By coincidence I have recently read, with an expanded sense of what a marvelous work it is, Waugh's war trilogy, *Sword of Honour*. That Ford and Waugh, those two analysts of, in Saunders' language, "social posing and posturing" should have had nothing to do with one another—especially that Waugh, who lived until 1966, never mentioned, perhaps out of perversity or concealment, what must have been his debt to Ford—is strange indeed.

Compared to *Parade's End*, Ford's other masterwork, *The Good Soldier*, has had more than its share of attention and admiration. It is, among other things, a wonderful book to read and (yes) study with students, as an example of what astonishing things a novel can be made to do. But as Roger Sale once put it, in his excellent essay "Ford's Coming of Age," "the fancy narration of *The Good Soldier* blinds many to the fact that it is a shabby little shocker."[2] Sale meant to provoke but in doing so put his finger on something important, and limiting, about the novel: that with whatever combination of sympathy or contempt you regard its narrator, Dowell, the book is full of poison, self-pity, disgust, sexual horror. Sale thinks that the superiority of *Parade's End* (I concur in the judgment) has everything to do with where it came in Ford's career; that Stella Bowen, Ford's "wife" in the early twenties when he began *Some Do Not*, rather than Violet Hunt, whom he was trying to get out of his system when he wrote *The Good Soldier*, was the presence that made all the difference. Perhaps so; but at any rate the sense of "life" Hartley, Sale and others find in *Parade's End* is altogether more generous and capacious than anything that shows up in *The Good Soldier*:[3] the tetralogy

[2] To be found, along with other interesting essays in *The Presence of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. by Sondra Stang (Philadelphia, 1981).

[3] Anthony Powell wrote, on rereading *The Good Soldier*, "Once more I found it deplorable. I can understand Graham Greene's passion for [it], indeed all Ford, because he is full of Graham's sort of baggage, RC problems, everyone lapped in self-pity . . . The story is narrated by an American wholly unlike any American one ever met, about a good

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is a morally and humanly more attractive piece of work, even—to invoke hesitatingly the Lawrentian ideal—a "bright book of life."

Ford's novels before *The Good Soldier*, only sampled by me, have their appeal to certain kinds of readers: *The Fifth Queen* trilogy, of which I got through volume 1, is impressive as historical re-creation of spectacle in Tudor England, but to appreciate it you need to enjoy historical novels. *A Call*, by consent his most Jamesian performance, published three years before *Henry James*, his casual little book of anecdotes (calling itself "a critical essay") about the Master, has its London atmosphere down pat, but otherwise its unreality is patent. Arnold Bennett, who knew something about reality, having written *The Old Wives' Tale*, said that *A Call* was "profoundly and hopelessly untrue to life," but that as an "original kind of fairy tale" it was just about perfect. (Ford's first publication, in 1893, was *The Brown Owl*, a fairy tale for children.) Still, it's not easy, and perhaps not wise, to trade in the novel for the fairy tale. Ford's final novels from the 1930s—*The Rash Act*, *Henry for Hugh*, and *Vive Le Roy*—feel similarly unreal. They receive words of praise from Saunders (Mizener was, by contrast, much more critically severe on them), but it's hard to take them seriously when we're constantly running up against writing like this, from the opening of chapter 2 of *The Rash Act*:

> Hugh Monckton Allard Smith had strolled across the floor of the little *dancing* to where Henry Martin had sat beside the silent depressed *poule*. Hugh Monckton, who had been rolling a cigarette as he walked, looked down on them from his considerable height, and, still rolling, had remarked nonchalantly to Henry Martin:
>
> "Met you somewhere, haven't I? Know your face. Because it's damn like my own." He added: "Would you pay for my drinks? I find I've left my notecase at home."

Can it be that this is by the lover of Flaubert, compatriot of Conrad, proselytizer for *progression d'effet*, the time shift—for Style as the only thing that makes writing interesting? It sounds rather as if P.G. Wodehouse were at the controls, except that Wodehouse is a good deal more amusing.

For me, Ford's books of biographical impressions and reminiscences of himself in relation to other writers are much more interesting, indeed delightful, than, with a very few exceptions, his novels. *Memories and Impressions* (on the pre-Raphaelites), *Thus to Revisit* (on English writers from the early part of this century), the splendid memoir of Conrad, *Return to Yesterday* and *It Was the Nightingale* (his two novelistic visits to his

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old English squire and cavalry officer, the background completely cardboard, who sleeps with every woman he meets. The last is believable enough, at same time immensely heavy weather made about it all. Finally he commits suicide in an orgy of Ford's Teutonic sentimentality." *Journals, 1990–1992* (London, 1997), p. 54.

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own past), *Portraits from Life*—these can be reread, skipping judiciously here and there, by way of discovering, as one always discovers, some memorable formulation. This time through *Thus to Revisit*, for example, I found the following, just to name three:

> —on Conrad's *The Secret Agent*: "Other writers would render a London that is just London. Mr. Conrad gives us the Eternal City that floats in the minds of an immense company of men. . . . It is, this place, triumphantly A City—but a city, rather of the human soul than any place in topography. Similarly the Anarchists of *The Secret Agent* are Anarchists of Nowhere."
>
> —on Henry James: "He liked to appear as a sort of Mr. Pickwick—with the rather superficial benevolences, and the mannerisms of which he was perfectly aware. But below that protective mask was undoubtedly a plane of nervous cruelty. I have heard him be—to simple and quite unpretentious people—more diabolically blighting than it was quite decent for a man to be—for he was always an artist in expression."
>
> —on his own poetry: "When I read my own verse I know that I have *tried* to write like a brandified sentimentalist. And I have succeeded every time."

There are of course countless more of such scattered throughout these books as well as *The March of Literature*, the immense survey of writing from Confucius to the present, that was published in 1938, a year before he died. Saunders calls it a "captivating demonstration of what it means to read" and quotes Margaret Cole, in a letter to Stella Bowen written after Ford was dead, saying about the book, "I have not for years read anything that so really *breathed* the spirit of literature as a thing that lived & went on through every sort of language & through every sort of age." *The March of Literature* (now available in paperback, courtesy of Dalkey Archive) was written partly at the Clarksville house of Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, aptly titled Benfolly, where Ford and Janice Biala spent time in the summer of 1937 (Ford was beginning and concluding his academic career as a professor at Olivet College in Michigan). Biala noted that it was "awful" that summer at Benfolly, that "in every room in the house there's a typewriter and at every typewriter there sits a genius." The host himself, Tate, put it this way:

> My wife Caroline Gordon, with one idiotic servant, ran the precariously balanced *ménage*. Ford could eat French food only, but Ida, with the occasional assistance of her mother Electra, the washerwoman, could not even cook Tennessee, much less French. Ford was unhappy in the 95°F, but every morning he paced the columned gallery—which had nothing but the earth to support it, and dictated to Mrs. Tworkov several pages of *The March of Literature*.

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It should also be remembered that Robert Lowell, who dropped in on the Tates and stayed for three months, had pitched his tent someplace on the lawn, which doubtless added to the daily festivities.

I have said virtually nothing here—and Max Saunders says a great deal, always to the point—about Ford and women, especially the two he lived with in the last two decades of his life, Stella Bowen and Janice Biala, both of whom appear as something close to heroines, certainly most admirable and attractive human beings. Biala, interviewed by Sondra Stang in 1979 for the collection Stang was putting together, said this when asked if Ford's life was a sad one (Mizener titled his biography, alluding to *The Good Soldier, The Saddest Story*):

> I don't think Ford had a sad life. I think of his great vitality (I think of all the books he wrote, how *much* he lived), his gaiety, his confidence, his optimism, his wild sense of humor. Ford did what he pleased all his life. . . . Those last days in Deauville, I had in a local doctor. He was a little mean-looking man, and after the first visit, Ford having been not a very good patient, he said: "It is obvious that Monsieur has always done whatever he wanted in his life." He said it spitefully and I could see *he'd* never done anything he wanted to do in his life. But how right he was.

And in response to the perception on the part of some contemporaries and critics that Ford's life looked to be a "disordered" one, Biala said it all in a single sentence: "A man who never missed a day's work in his life can't be said to have a disordered life."

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ALAN DAVIS

Armchair Traveler

OCCASIONALLY, AS A READER, I FEEL ALMOST INSANE in contemporary society, like a freak—a word I've taken to lately, a word my daughter uses on a daily basis. Channel surfing, I can't seem to find anyone on television who's read a book, unless it's Geraldo Rivera, who has an unpleasant habit of underlining lurid passages and holding the page up to the camera. Even in the educated world around me, I find that most of my friends—readers and lovers of books themselves—are overwhelmed with the impedimenta of stitching together a workaday life. We recommend books on the run, the way an advertisement might quote from a good review.

On the run, then, my feet tapping beneath this old-fashioned gunmetal gray typing cart (a keepsake from my mother), I am surrounded by the books that I've chosen to read over the past several months for this article. I'll begin by describing two novels by Nobel winners which, despite their pleasures, are programmatic, too much like required reading. Nadine Gordimer's twelfth novel, *The House Gun*, her second post-apartheid fiction about South Africa, is a courtroom thriller with a patina of existential angst.[1] In it, Duncan, the only child of Harald and Claudia, successful professionals before and after apartheid, kills Carl, his bisexual landlord and former lover, when he finds Carl atop Duncan's self-destructive girlfriend, Natalie. The novel unpacks that act of seemingly random violence for us, mostly from the perspectives of Harold and Claudia. Because Duncan killed Carl with the "house gun," apparently a necessity now in the violence-plagued country, and because the death penalty is a political hot potato, Gordimer arranges for her characters to anguish over political and moral conundrums in the context of the murder. For example: Since the house gun was lying around, could the act have been premeditated? Duncan's lawyer, a black man, digs deep into the secret lives of all involved to make a good case (which he does make—the only real drama in the book is our anticipation of the verdict), and his blackness turns out to be incidental, which is one of Gordimer's points. (Duncan, though, is curiously absent until the final pages of the book, when his thoughts provide a kind of coda.)

The problems in South Africa today, it seems, are problems we in the U.S. know all too well—random crime, the ethics of capital punishment, the anguish of seeing a son or daughter through trouble. These are very

[1] THE HOUSE GUN, by *Nadine Gordimer*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $24.00.

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human—as opposed to political—issues, and though we might argue, as Gordimer haphazardly does in these pages, that the personal is always political, the tone of a writer taking a stand against a great evil is naturally missing. Instead, the issues left to explore are what the pundits might call global village issues.

Unfortunately, for me the human drama got lost in Gordimer's relentless essayistic style, always precise and admirable but not sufficiently dramatic, and I found myself comparing the book unfavorably to *Before and After*, Rosellen Brown's 1992 novel that covers much of the same territory (from an American perspective, granted, but one of the lessons we can infer from Gordimer is that America and South Africa are no longer so unlike). If Brown is not Gordimer's stylistic or intellectual equal, she is a far better storyteller in that book, one that still haunts me with its human drama.

Whereas the black/white dynamic in *The House Gun* felt very American, governed more by a post-apartheid uncertainty principle than by any high crusade, in *Paradise*, Toni Morrison's latest novel, we are taken to the fictional Ruby, Oklahoma, an all-black township given to Biblical street names and Peyton Place feuds, a place that by its exclusive blackness felt a little South African.[2] Race tension is notable by its absence from the novel. Morrison, the other Nobel winner here, wants the story of Ruby to serve as a parable of the way things are in America for blacks without the distraction of overt racial conflict; the old order, male-dominated, flourishes in Ruby, but is threatened by "young people in trouble or acting up behind every door," by activists and protesters, and by the ordinary accumulation of lust and guilt between and among generations. Miles from anywhere, the community has protected its identity fiercely, shunning immigrants who are not black enough, avoiding white culture entirely, and living according to an injunction etched on stone in the center of town: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow."

The Convent, located outside of Ruby, houses not a religious order but women who have formed a place of their own after escaping from abuse or male domination; the novel begins (and ends) in 1976 when a group of men decide to attack it and kill the women living there. Each chapter, textured with social history and the weird intimacies that have sometimes developed between families and individuals, is the story of one such woman and how she came to live at the Convent. Though rich in episode and Morrison's stew of ear-perfect dialogue and magical realism, the structure of the book felt programmatic—Ruby's fall from grace is chronicled and events recycle and churn like a virus. The men of Ruby grow bitter and fierce at this "new and obscene breed of female," the women at the Convent gradually "lose the days" and take to "loud dreaming" until the attack is followed by a "credible, sermonizing account of it," people changing the story "to make themselves look

[2] PARADISE, by *Toni Morrison*. Alfred A. Knopf. $25.00.

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good." That is, the novel attempts to trace how an isolated inbred society rises and falls, no small ambition, and it does a credible job of it, but is sometimes more interested in a mock-historical unearthing of fictional archival data than in sustaining its dramatic intensity.

Still, anything new from Morrison is a must-read. Allan Gurganus' *Plays Well with Others,* on the other hand, is a slight book even at 350 pages.[3] I remember enjoying immensely the raconteurish wit of his *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All,* but this one, which chronicles the New York art scene in the seventies and the coming of AIDS in the eighties, is a disappointment. Gurganus' gimmick is that the tone of his book, despite the plague, is wry slapstick; his narrator, Hartley Mims, Jr., who is probably too autobiographical to force Gurganus sufficiently to transform his material, comes to New York from North Carolina. In short order, he gets to know Robert, a composer and a kind of Neal Cassady who serves Hartley as an icon, both "that baffling creature, someone truly bisexual" and "the prettiest boy in New York of his decade." Add Angie to the mix, an artist who "lived wild on purpose" and played "Wendy to the lost boys," and imagine Gurganus' playful comic persona chronicling the age, and you have the book without opening it, I am sorry to say. His style is cloying at times, as though he's decided to be both Mark Twain and Kurt Vonnegut to his fans, with some Tom Robbins thrown in to good effect. Here is a typical observation: "Now I understand another peculiar fact of physics: It is possible to sit before Love—even the love of someone dead—to sit before it as you would before a brand-new sun lamp, and to become, over time, quite tanned by it." I would say that maybe he's an acquired taste, except for the fact that I so enjoyed his previous work. In short, this one has a worthy conception: to write about a highflying moment in a particular subculture when sex and art were king and queen—or vice versa, maybe?—without reducing the moment to a dirge. Unfortunately, it doesn't come off, at least for me.

Enough said about Gurganus. I found myself drawn to an odd but astonishing novel, *Raki,* written by B. Wongar, a man who (according to the dust jacket and Wongar's own foreword) was born Streten Bozic in 1932 in Serbia and who emigrated to Australia, lived in the bush, and adopted his present Aboriginal name.[4] Imamu Baraka, in a blurb, is exactly right when he says that "Wongar's is a world that is magical and beauteous yet grim and unrelenting." In *Raki,* whose title is an Aboriginal word for rope, Wongar juxtaposes the appalling former practice in Australia of forcibly separating Aboriginal children from their tribal families to the destruction of his native Serbia, where, in Ottoman days, children were enslaved and taken to Istanbul (or Stamboul) to be janissaries. In W.W.II, in which *Raki* is set, there is a more immediate terror: ". . . a Serb's worth is judged by the clear whiteness of his body to

[3] PLAYS WELL WITH OTHERS, by *Allan Gurganus.* Alfred A. Knopf. $25.00.
[4] RAKI, by *B. Wongar.* Marion Boyars Publishers, Inc. $25.95.

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be used as fuel in the lime kilns . . . there is much good sense in this . . . for certainly resources are scarce in this part of Europe, so why use coal when there is an abundance of free human fuel close at hand?" Wongar's books, which document war crimes as well as more general crimes against the human spirit, were banned in Australia until recently, but I suspect that had authorities left him alone the attention he might have received would have been literary more than political, for his style is obsessive and episodic, magically realistic and rough-hewn—in a word, difficult, full of herbal lore, dream visions, folklore, mythology, and surreal episodes that move from hallucination to accounts of terror and bleak prophecy: "That night Nana saw Perisha and Milan in her dream, both looking tired, their skin muddied with earth. Perisha had a cut on his forehead: 'One of us is going to die today.'" He's fascinating, but he's not an easy read. I should also add, though, that there is a grim survivor's humor that plays through the narrative, especially when Wongar satirizes the authorities either in Australia or Europe; the Australian Protector believes, for instance, that a special parliamentary committee should be set up to ban campfires in the bush because they cast evil spells.

This same sense of otherworldliness pervades two of the three books left to review. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicles*, a Japanese novel translated by Jay Rubin, is the first book I've read by Haruki Murakami, who has reportedly sold millions of volumes; several of his books are available in Vintage paperbacks.[5] The *Chronicles* is a big book, heavy enough to serve as a doorstop, but it has the tone of a pleasant afternoon dream that occasionally darkens and tells a tale of exile or danger that belongs to somebody else's life; Murakami is fantastical and inventive without being cloying. If it had more method to its madness, I would say it's a sort of *Catch-22* for the slacker generation, but in fact it's merely a good, odd read. Toru Okada, the narrator and protagonist, is a touching, passive man who comes to be called, by book's end, "Mr. Wind-Up Bird." He's a professional gofer in his early thirties who loses his job and his wife Kumiko and goes on a strange comic quest for his cat, which is also lost. He finds instead Malta and Creta Kano, two psychic sisters, real people who also enter his dreams to guide him or devil him, he's not sure which, and May Kasahara, a teenage waif who hangs out with him, and the novel quickly takes a through-the-looking-glass turn, though Toru's antic quest, one carried out at times by climbing to the bottom of a dry well, is interrupted on occasion by pseudo-historical accounts of wartime torture and trauma that are memorable and haunting. There is, for example, a step-by-step account of a Japanese soldier in Outer Mongolia on a spy mission who witnesses another man being flayed alive that I am not likely to forget soon.

I should also say, though it may make me sound like an amateur, that

[5] THE WIND-UP BIRD CHRONICLES, by *Haruki Murakami*. Trans. by *Jay Rubin*. Alfred A. Knopf. $25.95.

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the book's zaniness and improvisations made me happy, in the way that Roddy Doyle's love of language and of his Irish people in his Barrytown trilogy makes me happy. Murakami also is a connoisseur of pop culture who incorporates off-the-cuff tidbits from the mid-eighties, the setting of the novel, and I enjoyed his ability to turn casual details into the fabric of a big, ambitious book. In the end, though, I remember this one more as a picaresque anthology, an objective correlative for the way the imagination works in a culture obsessed with television, than as a coherent narrative.

Not so Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, an extraordinary debut whose minor flaws are endearing rather than off-putting.[6] It won the most recent Booker Prize, of course, and its own peculiar brand of magical realism, used structurally to render the world view of children, reminded me not of Murakami's offhand inventiveness, the prose equivalent of channel surfing that undercuts the significance of particular events, but of the gravitas Michael Ondaatje achieved when he wrote *In the Skin of a Lion* and its sequel *The English Patient*, which also nabbed a Booker.

Roy's novel is told by Rahel, back from America to the province of Kerala in India, the home of her once-wealthy family, to face the past, dramatized most significantly by an account of a drowning twenty-three years earlier and of the events surrounding it. We meet a dazzling array of characters very quickly and Roy sees to it that they all occupy their own distinct imaginative place, so that we do not forget them in the flow of the narrative. Rahel's brother Estha, a fraternal twin, born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs, is tiny and silent and occupies "very little space in the world." Roy quickly establishes the double vision of the novel that slides easily between brother and sister, between the worlds of childhood and of adult experience: "Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End." This use of capitalization in the style of an eighteenth-century writer to emphasize a child's way of perceiving reality occasionally becomes an annoying tic, but mostly it contributes to the convincing texture of the book that talks around and finally unpacks the drowning and subsequent funeral of Sophie Mol—Rahel and Estha's cousin—who is nine when she visits India from England and dies.

All of the characters who erupt into the book, one that lovingly limns place and culture in India in the late sixties, when Communism challenged the caste system, are clearly rendered. Rahel's mother Ammu, for example, dies at thirty-one, "a viable die-able age," from dissipation and "madness, which was said to run in the family." She lives on the "Unsafe Edge," and a fling she once had with Velutha, an Untouchable who "had a way with machines" and who is scapegoated as

[6] THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS, by *Arundhati Roy*. Random House. $23.00.

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the cause of Sophie Mol's drowning, gives the book its lyrical finish: "They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things." Other characters include Margaret Kochamma, Sophie Mol's English mother; Chacko, Sophie Mol's biological father; Baby Kachamma, Rahel's great aunt, a schemer allowed to get an education "since she couldn't have a husband"; grandfather Pappachi, an entomologist, and grandmother Mammachi, who ran the family's pickle factory. Each is individualized through a passion or a reappearing quirk and entangled in the novel by allegiance towards or withdrawal from place and family. Roy's supple style sensuously evokes not only the original vision of childhood but also its lostness and confusion, its small, sad losses. Prayers to the god of ordinary things become a motif in the book—it's the one god that might console characters for whom fate has mostly tragedy or disappointment in store.

"When you hurt people," Rahel's mother tells her, "they begin to love you less." This is a novel about families and the ways that they can go wrong. With its cast of eccentrics and the inability of its characters to escape from ingrained codes of behavior and belief, I found myself thinking of Carson McCullers, of Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, in fact of Toni Morrison and of any number of American chronicles wherein families locked into Southern codes of behavior or belief cannot escape from their pre-determined lot without a leap of faith.

It's a book I will reread and probably teach as well, a book that "opens" India to me as other relatively recent books by Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry did, though a more magical book than those others because of its style—a book, in short, to conjure with. By contrast, the last book I'll bring to your attention has a more topical weight: it's George V. Higgins' *A Change of Gravity*, a story that uncannily parallels the recent goings-on in the perennial battle between our President and his independent prosecutor.[7] (I think all of us should have independent prosecutors, a sort of symbol for the guilty conscience society would burden us with.) Just today, for example, the president of the American Bar Association had this to say: "Does prosecutorial zeal justify sting operations and unauthorized wiretapping in order to leverage the hiding of non-criminal, sexual indiscretion into a criminal obstruction of justice?" His statement could be placed on Higgins' dust jacket as a blurb if the publisher wished.

Because I had read this book before the so-called scandal broke, I knew without a glossary what the difference was, for example, between use immunity and transactional immunity when a witness is called before a grand jury. On a smaller scale than that underway in the daily papers, and telling the story almost entirely in dialogue, Higgins' title refers to the changeover in political gravity from John Kennedy's time to

[7] A CHANGE OF GRAVITY, by *George V. Higgins*. Henry Holt and Company, Inc. $25.00.

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our own, so that "what was good, clean wickedness in 1960 had become a felony in 1996."

In the book, the friendship between Danny Hilliard, an up-and-coming politician with an eye for the ladies, and Ambrose Merrion, a sort of fixer who becomes clerk of court in a Massachusetts town, tools along in cruising gear until enemies political and personal gang up on the two in a sort of tag-team match to take advantage of personal indiscretions. An unscrupulous, self-righteous federal prosecutor who wants vengeance instead of justice puts the squeeze on Merrion to give up his friend.

Sound familiar?

Around the middle of the book, once Higgins has finished chronicling, in a variety of voices, Hilliard's rise, the tone swerves: "When Hilliard figured in newsworthy events, the identifier in the papers gradually changed: 'Powerful Ways and Means Chairman' became 'Embattled Chairman.'" Higgins, the author of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* among many other novels, and himself a former prosecutor, is an able guide—if only someone of his insight were covering the face-off between the President and his accusers, I might be willing to pay more attention. Higgins takes us into that place where the political and the personal are nearly indistinguishable, where leverage is everything, and the perception of leverage as important as money in the bank. The book is an education about the workings of the criminal justice system and the way that some people who use it to their advantage are in turn crushed by it when it turns against them, just as often for malicious, personal reasons as for rationales that relate to the good of the republic. The book, I should add, is also a page-turner, an old-fashioned good read.

That's it: reading these books, and thinking about them, has actually made me feel less like a freak, I realize, and more sane, as though the antidote to the pace of contemporary society is not more information—additional channels, multiple chat rooms, more videotapes—but the enforced seclusion of a good book or, for that matter, even a not-so-good book. I have an acquaintance who likes to say that he prefers a bad book to a good movie; and for the first time, recommending these books on the run, I see what he means. We do not consume books, we read them, but even so, they are a kind of food. The menus for a few good meals are posted herein.

Bon appétit. Gotta go.

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BRIAN COX

Shakespeare in and out the Classroom

IN 1988 I CHAIRED A WORKING GROUP OF NINE PEOPLE plus Civil Servants set up by the British Government to devise a National Curriculum in English for all children between the ages of five and sixteen. We met for a year in London on the sixth floor of the offices of the Department of Education overlooking Waterloo Station.

Among the witnesses we interviewed was Rex Gibson, the Series Editor of the Cambridge School Shakespeare texts. He amazed us by immediately demanding that we participate in a demonstration of how he would start to teach *The Tempest* to a class of fifteen-year-olds. He divided my Working Group into two, placed us on either side of the table, and then provided us with xeroxed sheets of curses spoken by Prospero and Caliban. We were told to shout the curses at each other. We obeyed with a will; while one side shouted "poisonous slave," "hag-seed" or "tortoise" the others responded:

> A south-west blow on ye,
> And blister you all o'er.

or

> The red-plague rid you
> For learning me your language.

I wondered what the Civil Servants in adjacent rooms would make of all this commotion, and I feared we might be exposing repressed tensions in my Group.

In this new collection of essays, *Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-First Century*, the teacher-authors agree that performance must be central in the teaching of Shakespeare, both for high school pupils and undergraduates.[1] There are thirty-two articles here, all with practical suggestions for classroom activities; many include film, video and computers. In the old days large numbers of students were put off Shakespeare for life by being forced to annotate and comment on texts *ad nauseam*

[1] TEACHING SHAKESPEARE INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, ed. by *Ronald E. Salomone* and *James E. Davis*. Ohio University Press. $24.95.

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without ever seeing or participating in a production. It is now commonplace for students to make dramatic presentations before their peers. When they succeed they often experience an overwhelming sense of exhilaration.

In the first essay in this collection, J.L. Styan of Northwestern University insists that performance teaching aims to turn a dead classroom into a seeing and hearing place, a living theatre. Writing assignments must not only promote close reading, but also encourage visualization and criticism of performance activities.

The argument against too much performance teaching in the classroom is that it may reduce itself to the chanting of spells by pupils dressed up as Macbeth's witches or to clowning about as Dogberry or Falstaff. Like the teacher-authors in this collection, Rex Gibson insisted to my Working Group that the exercise based on Prospero's and Caliban's curses should be used to stimulate interest in Shakespeare's language. Pupils may be encouraged to make their own curses (within limits) as an introduction to study in detail of specific Shakespearian effects. What is impressive in this new collection of essays is that almost all the authors are completely committed to careful study of language. Obviously if you are to teach Shakespeare, in contrast to a modern author such as Arthur Miller, then the problem of "archaic" language must be addressed. But language in Shakespeare involves far more than explanation of meanings. The multiple images, the rich vocabulary, the play of words astonish us. By appropriate word games and role playing, with emphasis on tone and presentation, it is possible to arouse a genuine interest in what he is doing with language and why.

The fears of traditional teachers will be much allayed by the first section of this admirable collection; we are offered five essays on appropriate writing assignments to accompany performance teaching. William T. Liston of Ball State University, Indiana, admits that contemporary students are frequently not skilled in reading carefully nor in hearing voices from the printed page. Nor are they familiar with many grammatical constructions that students of an earlier period would have known through study of a foreign language. He advocates a daily paraphrase. When he first tried this exercise on his students he discovered that many did not know what a paraphrase is. He provides model answers written by himself, a practice none of my teachers followed fifty years ago when I was at school. He puts himself on the line, and asks for questions and criticism.

The second section includes five essays on performance techniques. Robert B. Pierce of Oberlin College offers a particularly interesting account of how he teaches the sonnets through performance exercises. The sonnets encourage the student to imagine a dramatic setting, are poetically rich, have an emotional center that may be close to the reader's experience, and are brief enough to be convenient for class treatment. They are also short enough to be learnt off by heart. He asks each student (and himself) to choose one line from a sonnet and then

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to read it aloud, emphasizing what they believe to be the most important word. This leads to close analysis of iambic pentameter and its relation to meaning. The aim is to arrive at a performance of a poem which is also an understanding of it. All this seems far more exciting than the drab lectures I suffered when I was an undergraduate in the 1950s.

The third section (six essays) considers how recent literary theory, particularly the new historicism and reader-response theory, should influence classroom practice. This section worried me. Too often excellent teachers commit themselves to critical theories just when these are being challenged by a new generation of scholars. When I started at my British grammar school at the end of the 1930s, my enthusiastic teacher interpreted Shakespeare according to the dictates of A.C. Bradley with never a reference to F.R. Leavis or *Scrutiny*.

The essay by Paul Skrebels of the University of South Australia commits all of us to a postmodern world, a culture where identities merge and shift rather than become uniform and static. He argues that the new historicism would have more to offer the teacher of literature if emphasis moved away from analysis of past cultures through plays, popular song, legal documents, iconography, travelers' tales and so on, to examining aspects of our own culture and the way its texts are constantly shaped out of a reading of the past. He offers a transhistorical approach, comparing the rejection of Hero at the wedding in *Much Ado about Nothing* with the Charles and Diana scandals in the British royal family. He rightly says that old-fashioned teaching often made the texts boring and irrelevant, with the teacher sounding like a pompous Polonius. Certainly his students must have enjoyed talking about toe-sucking and other scandals, but was the end result an enhanced enjoyment and understanding of Shakespeare? Skrebels takes for granted that we can never transcend our own historical situation, that the teacher is an historicist and the student is not. The student believes in universals and the teacher does not. My view is that in the 1990s a number of texts (notably Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*) have reintroduced into the debate the notion of quality, that certain texts are superior to others, and that this applies in every culture and every historical situation.

Obviously reader-response theory has much to offer in the classroom. Students should be encouraged to develop honest points of view rather than to kowtow to the teacher. A reading of *Romeo and Juliet* by a sixteen-year-old is certain to vary considerably from the reactions of a sceptical old man like me. The variety of legitimate interpretations of Shakespeare's plays means no one teacher has the right to impose one absolute authoritative interpretation. But this does not mean there are no illegitimate interpretations. A main purpose of the critical process is to reject illegitimate interpretations by close reference to the text. According to Bloom, aesthetic value is an actuality recognized the whole world over, and cannot be reduced to ideology or sociology.

In this teaching context, what will be the influence of Helen Vendler's

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The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets, perhaps the most brilliant interpretation of Shakespeare to be published in the 1990s?[2] Vendler is so committed to performance that her book includes an audio CD with her own readings of sixty-five chosen sonnets. Actors, she rightly says, often do not understand the meaning of what they are saying. They constantly give wrong emphasis to lines, not observing inner antitheses and parallels. She admits a reading would best be done by a male voice. Her own readings (and she has learnt all the sonnets off by heart) are clear and a little melancholy in tone, without the vivacity needed for Shakespeare's verbal pyrotechnics. But her emphasis faithfully records her own interpretations, and to this I shall return.

All sonnets are printed both in the original Quarto form and in her own modernized versions. After her Introduction, her book consists of detailed commentary on each sonnet. Her central argument is that a Shakespearian sonnet is fundamentally structured by an evolving inner emotional dynamic, and that the chief defect of many previous critical readings of the *Sonnets* has been a propensity to take the first line of a sonnet as a "topic sentence" which the rest of the poem merely illustrates and reiterates. In her Introduction she points out that in almost every sonnet significant words from the body of the poem are repeated in the couplet, and she calls these links the Couplet Tie. This device not only points up the thematic intensities of each sonnet, but also shows how the same words take on different emotional import as the poem progresses. Her commentaries are immensely exciting to read for anyone who is fascinated by the verbal ingenuities of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

In recent decades there have been many attempts to reduce Shakespeare to his historical contexts, to deny his universality and wisdom. Helen Vendler's sensitive examination of his extraordinary linguistic diversity may do something to end these absurdities. Harold Bloom writes:

> We owe to Shakespeare not only our representation of cognition but much of our capacity for cognition. The difference between Shakespeare and his nearest rivals is one of both kind and degree, and that double difference defines the reality and necessity of the Canon.[3]

Vendler's immensely enriching close readings of the *Sonnets* justify this claim. She writes:

> Contemporary emphasis on the participation of literature in a social matrix balks at acknowledging how lyric, though it may *refer to* the social, remains the genre that directs its *mimesis* toward the perform-

[2] THE ART OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS, by *Helen Vendler*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. $35.00.

[3] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (San Diego, 1995), pp. 40–41.

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> ance of the mind in *solitary* speech. Because lyric is intended to be voiceable by anyone reading it, in its normative form it deliberately strips away most social specification (age, regional location, sex, class, even race).

She argues forcibly that any reading of the *Sonnets* that focuses chiefly on their themes loses almost all of their aesthetic richness. The effect of lyric lies elsewhere than in its paraphrasable statement.

Can Vendler's aesthetic concern with language become a major influence on teaching activities? In his review of Vendler in the *London Review of Books*, Tom Paulin calls her book an epic, innovatory study which ought to make a new beginning for criticism. In his review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Alastair Fowler suggests her book may well signal an eventual return to serious study of literary art. But he doubts whether many students at present have the equipment or attention span for the sort of rigor she challenges. Words like "isomorphic," "chiastic," or "deictic" are likely to send most students back to their dictionaries. Students lack the intensive ear training (now vanished in the West) of the Renaissance poet.

Rex Gibson and Robert B. Pierce show that in a performance context students can become so fascinated by language they are happy to learn appropriate terminology, even if the sophistication of Vendler's methods may be beyond their reach. They can be made aware how sound, as opposed to image, patterns work. Vendler demonstrates the dazzling variety of Shakespeare's word games, the extraordinary virtuosity of his use of anagrams, puns and verbal links. Her analyses are not exercises in barren formalism; she explores with rich understanding Shakespeare's sexual infatuation with the young man, his masochism, his lust for the promiscuous dark lady. If Pierce chose an appropriate sonnet for his students to perform, they would be entranced to read Vendler's demonstration of Shakespeare's complex variety of tone.

Typical of her enthusiasm for verbal effects are her comments on Sonnet 29:

> When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state
> (Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate,

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> For thy sweet love rememb'red such wealth brings
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Helen Vendler concludes her analysis of this sonnet:

> In the most joyous play of the poem, the disgruntled present participles—*wishing, desiring,* with their "wrong" arrangement of letters—suddenly give rise to new present participles where the letters are arranged "right": *despising, arising* and then the verb *sing—sing, sing, sing!* The poem fairly carols. Even the first line of the couplet (in *brings*—"rings!") makes the air resound; but at the end, in the scorned *kings,* the word *sing* lies scrambled again, as it did in *wishing* and *desiring.* As he integrates the world of kings with the world of nature, locates his superlative friend, and, as a lark, finds a listening heaven, the poet rediscovers an integrated mental state.

This *tour de force,* fresh observation based on specific analysis of musical effects, surely provides wonderful material for classroom use by a good teacher.

Keats wrote to J.H. Reynolds that he found so many beauties in the *Sonnets* "they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally—in the intensity of working out conceits." My one disagreement with Vendler is that perhaps she does not sufficiently recognize how often highly personal dramatic sonnets take off into statements of extraordinary impersonal power (whilst still retaining their dramatic force). Vendler often finds herself in disagreement with commentators on the *Sonnets* such as Stephen Booth. Her analysis of the famous Sonnet 116 is particularly contentious:

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments; love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove.
> O no, it is an ever-fixed mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken; . . . .

Vendler rejects the usual interpretation that this is an "impersonal" sonnet on the marriage of true minds. She reads it in the sequence not as a definition of love but as a rebuttal of some statement by the young man whom Shakespeare loves. While many previous readers have treated the sonnets as discursive propositional statements, she sees them as situationally motivated speech acts. The speaker is "savagely" clarifying the "alter" and "bend" presumably implicit in what the young man has been saying. The usual reading, she says, represents an "astonishing" history of critical oversight. She disagrees completely with Booth's interpretation that "in 116 the speaker is grand, noble, general, and beyond logic; in 117 he is petty, particular, and narrowly logical." On her

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CD reading she gives particular emphasis to *me* in the first line: "Let *me* not to the marriage of true minds . . . ."

This is not the way I read the first line (and I was asked to read it at my son's wedding, so perhaps I'm prejudiced). Vendler—surprisingly—does not mention how the sonorous rhythms of the opening lines depend on alliteration ("me," "marriage," "minds" leading on through other consonants to "mark" in the fifth line). This music gives the lines that serenity and sense of general truth to which readers for generations have responded. The strong rhythm of the final couplet is similarly more of an affirmation than a dramatic argument:

> If this be error and upon me proved,
> I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Vendler talks of the "chilling impersonality of the hideous implied 'law of alteration and removal.' " Like the word "savagely," "chilling" seems to me completely inappropriate for the grandeur of the music of this poem. Like Sonnet 29 this sonnet sings with a music beyond any particular occasion. The alliteration of the couplet ("me" and "man") and the return to the word "loved" at the very end link beginning and ending with affirmations impersonal yet deeply felt.

And so Vendler, teachers, students, may return to the *Sonnets* to argue, evaluate, discuss the most astonishing sequence of English love poems ever written. I hope her book persuades an increasing number of students to fall in love with the art of literature.

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ROBERT PHILLIPS

Poetry, from Good to Bad to Verse

IF SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME, DECADES AGO, that we would have a generation of poets named Dick and Dave and Billy and Larry, Pattianne, Jorie, Kelly and Belle, I would have been disbelieving. Poets had names like Vachel, Wystan and Delmore, Emily, Christina and Edith. That was then. Now we have national leaders who call themselves Billy Graham, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Well, as the Bard Billy Shakespeare reminded us, "What's in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet." So let's look at the poems.

Dick Allen (b. 1939), according to dust jacket copy, "is a central figure in America's often neglected 'transitional generation'—poets born in the late 1930s and early 1940s." It is true that many fine poets have been excluded from influential anthologies because they were born too late or too early. Allen's *Ode to the Cold War: Poems New & Selected* gives the reader an opportunity to assess what this particular poet has been up to for over thirty years.[1]

Allen has chosen to include nothing from his very first book, the sci-fi *West Is Up* (circa 1960), which he published under the name Richard Stanley Allen, and only a few poems from *Anon and Various Time Machine Poems* (1971). The latter is an amicable pop epic of an American Everyman written in the oral tradition and owing a good deal to Bob Dylan (not Dylan Thomas). Its subject matter and simple three-line stanzas do not seem to have much bearing on Allen's later lyrical, formal and mystical development. He truly began to find himself with the poems of *Regions With No Proper Names* (1975), a record of the 1960s and the way things seemed to the poet then.

His best work came with *Overnight in the Guest House of the Mystic* (1984)—poems of journeys and explorations of self and love—and *Flight and Pursuit* (1987)—a return to Allen's earlier social and political concerns, but with an increased lyricism. Excellent as these poems are, there seemed a danger of Allen's hardening into mannerisms. For instance, in "The People Through the Train Window," the poet exhorts us to

[1] ODE TO THE COLD WAR: Poems New & Selected, by *Dick Allen*. Sarabande Books. $25.00; $14.95.

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> Seize the day, oh seize the day, oh seize
> your life with every tendon . . .

In "Small Hotel," Allen rhapsodizes

> Good morning, good, good morning, Christ it's good . . .

And in "Crows and Windmills" he out-gerunds himself with

> Moon bleeding, stars falling, sea sinking, rocks rolling . . .

Such repetitions soon begin to grate. These were surprising lapses from a poet with such a good ear, a poet who could play the name "Burchfield" against "bunchgrass."

I'm happy to report that Allen has shed these excesses in the section of new poems in this collection. Here he is writing with all his senses: fuchsia looks like "a clown's umbrella of red and purple and tassels"; a frog gives both "plash and galump"; one can smell doused campfires and incense tapers, feel the wind blowing on prison walls above secret towns. Allen also has adopted strategies which are new (to him) to refresh his writing. One is to compose a poem on a single extended metaphor, such as "Throwing Caution to the Wind" or "The Narrow Mind" or "Still Waters." Another is to take a phrase from, say Heraclitus, and compose a fugue around it; another device is the list poem, as in "Ode to the Cold War." Throughout these new poems Allen is writing a poetry of ideas—asking big questions such as, "Does anything ever happen / The way we suppose? Is it our suppositions / Which change the patterns from what might have happened?"

These are very satisfying poems, which invariably know when and how to end. "Parents Support Group" closes with the wrenching lines,

> Back in their halls
> Our children hunch above their Scrabble board
> Or shoot the breeze
> As aimlessly as they shot down our world.

Kelly Cherry (b. 1940) has been around long enough to have published five books of poetry, five novels, a collection of essays, and an autobiographical narrative. Her fifth collection is full of deaths.[2] The deaths include those of both parents, an ex-husband—even the parents' dog. Before the actual deaths come the illnesses which signal death by degree—strokes, emphysema, Alzheimer's. In a series of formal poems early in the book, Cherry shows herself to be in total control over such

[2] DEATH AND TRANSFIGURATION, by *Kelly Cherry*. Louisiana State University Press. $19.95; $11.95.

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emotional material. Part of her aesthetic distance is achieved through admirable use of rhyme and slant rhyme: Park/clock, called/compelled, delicate/weight, gesture/investiture, marrow/sorrow. Such rhymes never are saccharine. She also asks big rhetorical questions which arise from the minutia of her life.

Can you imagine not who you might have been but who you were? In the best of these early poems, Cherry is able to see herself and family as players in some exterior drama. In "Alzheimer's" her father returning from the hospital stands at the door:

> The first
> Thing he must do, now that he is home, is decide who
> This woman is, this old, white-haired woman
> Standing here in the doorway,
> Welcoming him in.

Such moments are jolting. But later in the book, when Cherry attempts to project personal loss upon a larger pattern, the poems lose punch. She cannot bridge the personal to the universal. Poems invoking the Yalta Conference, Chernobyl, Qaddafi and Saddam Hussein seem more willed than inspired. And the final poem, "Requiem," inevitably calls for comparison with Anna Akhmatova's poem of the same title (written 1935–40). Cherry's requiem is not the big summation of the book's overall theme for which she doubtless was reaching. With its allusions to Holocaust victims and tanks ranked at barricades, as well as all her own personal losses, the poet attempts a major statement but seems unable to achieve it. As she herself admits within the text,

> Perhaps I don't know how to put this
> Precisely, but perhaps I will. I am trying to know
> Things that stay just outside the window
> Of language, and yet the romance of ambiguity
> Has never appealed to me . . .

Precisely. There are lots of deaths here, but not much transfiguration. When Kelly Cherry focusses on her own problems, she achieves some remarkable lyrics. When she takes on the world, as did Akhmatova when she made her hero "the people," Cherry's vision falters, her voice flattens.

A recent reference book published by Oxford University Press dismissed the work of Larry Levis (1946–1996) as that of "a typical exponent of the mainstream Iowa Writers Workshop/*American Poetry Review* . . . style that has dominated American poetry for the past twenty years . . . " It is true that the poet attended some of the fashionable workshops (Syracuse and Iowa). But given the trajectory of Levis' work, this assessment seems wrong-headed. From the spare poems of his first

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book, *Wrecking Crew* (1972), with their startling imagery ("neons glistening in rain like dead insect eggs"), through the longer and more discursive lines of *Winter Stars* (1985) and *The Widening Spell of the Leaves* (1991), Levis was opening himself to new influences and subjects. He began to write poems in the ekphrastic mode, and intentionally to echo Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Pound, and Neruda. And it appears that along the way he got heavily bitten by James Wright, evidenced in lines such as:

> Anything is enough if you know how poor you are.
> You could step out now in wonder.

(Sure. You also could break into blossom.) His choice of subject matter became Wrightian as well. One late poem is a monologue by one of the two thieves crucified with Christ. (Shades of "Saint Judas.")

Now we have what may be his last single volume.[3] Levis died unexpectedly two years ago at the age of fifty. It will take a posthumous selected or collected poems to show the full range of his development, and that volume may not easily be achieved, since his single books were published by three publishers. But *Elegy* is a potent representation of the work of his last six years.

It is not clear whether Levis chose the book's title. The volume was assembled from manuscripts by Levis' former teacher and mentor, Philip Levine. Whatever, the title is extremely apt. Nine of the last poems begin with the word "Elegy," as in "Elegy with an Angel at Its Gate," and the book itself is an elegy for Levis. Everywhere on these pages one finds a valedictory note: If Kelly Cherry laments her family, with Levis it is as if the poet were taking stock at what he knew to be the end of his own life. Here is a striking image from the poem which has been placed first, "The Two Trees":

> The black windows looked out onto the black lawn.

Everywhere there is evidence of a sensibility come to termination. The narrator of this particular poem stops on his way home each evening to talk to two trees, a box elder and a horse chestnut. In another poem the poet talks to weeds. In a third an opossum ("The Oldest Living Thing in L.A.") tries desperately to negotiate Wilshire and Santa Monica Boulevards. In "Shiloh" the poet identifies with a Confederate soldier blown into the limbs of a tree, his arms seemingly becoming wings. In addition to the thief crucified with Jesus, we encounter a fifteen-year-old thief aboard ship with Columbus and his first glimpse of the New World. Always there is the heavy baggage of the past, which outweighs the promise of the future. In "Elegy for Whatever Had a Pattern in It" (Levis

[3] ELEGY, by *Larry Levis*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $25.00; $12.95.

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had a way with titles), the operative word is "Oblivion." He repeats it four times in the final stanzas.

One does not follow one's bliss by reading such poetry. In one of the strongest poems in the book, "Elegy with a Thimbleful of Water in the Cage," we are given a postmodern version of the Cumaean Sybil and her plaint, "I want to die." Even the familiar legend of Daphne's metamorphosis into a tree becomes a tale of a girl whose van skids into the trunk of an oak.

The jury on Larry Levis will be out until we have the larger book. But on the strength of this last single collection, certain critics should already be revising their earlier dismissive assessments.

To go from the last poems of Larry Levis to the earliest poems of John Haines (b. 1924) is to step from the chill of shadow into the warmth of sunlight. And yet even sun and light cannot transform these pieces of juvenilia into achieved poetry.[4] Written between 1948 and 1954, the poems are described in the author's Preface as "representative of an early period of apprenticeship." I cannot imagine why the writer chose to resurrect them. Experiments in lyrics, narratives, meditative sequences, and dramatic episodes, they may be of interest someday to scholars, tracing Haines's pursuit of mastery. But the lyricism, wit and concision which he later developed is little in evidence here. Instead we are regaled with smoky hills, lemon light, gray November, dead fires, empty graves, bright stars, flickering candles, dark hills, chambers of the dead, and much much more. These early poems read like late Louis L'Amour. What this book does accomplish is make it apparent what a long climb it was to the achievement of Haines's *News from the Glacier: Selected Poems 1980* and *New Poems 1980–1988*, in which he displayed his true subjects and voice. When we remember Haines, let us recall him for his vivid renderings of adult Alaskan frontier life, and not these tepid jottings of his youth in Washington, New York, Provincetown and California. The cover art, a painting by Morris Graves, is superb.

I thought that publication in 1995 of *In the Bank of Beautiful Sins* by Penguin Poets would make Robert Wrigley's name that of a significant poet of his American generation (b. 1951). That does not seem to have happened. Now we have a reissue in one volume of his two previous books, giving us another chance to identify Wrigley and his work. It is fine.[5]

The two books are in some ways quite dissimilar, although the prevailing voice in each is that of an active white Midwestern male. During their careers some poets manage to issue a single signature volume, such as Roethke's *The Lost Son* with all its greenhouse poems. For Wrigley *Moon in a Mason Jar* seems such a volume. Insects and

[4] AT THE END OF THIS SUMMER: Poems, 1948–1954, by *John Haines*. Copper Canyon Press. $14.00p.

[5] MOON IN A MASON JAR & WHAT MY FATHER BELIEVED, by *Robert Wrigley*. University of Illinois Press. $16.95p.

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creatures are for Wrigley what plants and roots were to Roethke. He takes us painfully close—sometimes literally painfully—to the lives and habits of bees, wasps, termites, worms, fireflies, carp, and snowy owls, among others. When the young protagonist's life and the natural world coalesce, the result is moments of mystery and strange poetry, as in "The Glow," when a schoolboy finds himself in a fallen tree containing a bee hive. When he reports back to school, everyone stares at him:

> . . . his clothes frayed, heavy with rain,
> his face a smear of small bleeding cuts
> and drops of honey, winking
> in the lights like iridescent scabs.
>
> From his shoes amber puddles flowed
> outward. All up and down
> his legs was a fresco of bees,
> mementos, souvenirs
> fastened to a plaque and varnished.

With the allusion to a fresco, the reference to varnish, this is highly particularized poetry. Such moments occur again and again.

Another aspect of Wrigley's writing which is admirable is his use of sound. So many poets are content to employ only the visual sense. But Wrigley is highly aural as well. A skidding car pitches and screeches, chicks bubble, old plumbing has dim respiration, a backhoe revs and grunts, horses nicker and snuffle, dry autumn leaves applaud, and so forth. One could learn to write more vividly by studying these lines.

If the central protagonist of *Mason Jar* is the young Wrigley, that of *Father Believed* seems a Wrigley of draft age during the time of Vietnam. It is a shorter collection, but no less intense. "For the Last Summer" (a poem whose title might have served as a better title for the book) deals with the loss of innocence—the poet's own, the last summer of his youth, the summer before he was drafted into the Army. The poem also deals with the need to take responsibility—by both the individual and by the nation as a whole.

Other poems continue the political theme. "What My Father Believed" confronts a World War II veteran's loss of faith during the Vietnam War. "Invisible Man" is about the lack of recognition of black servicemen during that war. "C.O." is about the poet's ultimate political stand, while "Shrapnel" is one of the most moving poems, relating the friendship of a wounded veteran and a Conscientious Objector. "Economics" is a narrative in which a young man has an epiphany, realizing there are certain class lines in America which he never will cross. When the desirable, pampered daughter of the Ford dealer who employs him to wash cars waves to him,

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his blood sped in his veins, and he knew
she'd come no nearer to him ever in his life.

After reading these two books in their original editions, I had thought the only thing preventing Robert Wrigley from becoming a considerable poet was his confinement to personal subject matter. Then he went on to write *In the Bank of Beautiful Sins,* which contains numerous poems utilizing personae and projections. What can stop him now?

Nurses often write arresting poems. I suppose it is due to the drama of their everyday existences—the severity of life or death situations. Instead of writing about pulling daisies, nurses write about amputations. Anne Caston's *Flying Out with the Wounded* (New York University Press) is an excellent recent book by a nurse, with poems on autopsies, lobotomies, burn wards, intensive care units. Despite the harshness of the subject matter, the poems warm and humanize the reader.

Belle Waring (b. 1951) also has been a nurse, and now teaches creative writing at Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. Her second book, all free verse, contains a number of poems apparently generated by her nursing job, and in others she writes of other women, usually less educated and less fortunate than herself.[6] Her two best poems are taken from secondary sources—the diary of a Polish clinic nurse, recorded in 1945, and the diary of a Missouri prisoner's nurse, from 1972. The poems about her own nursing experience often are filled with resentment for the blunders of male doctors.

The problem with many of these poems is that Waring carries the language of her privileged world into that of the underprivileged. Examples: A relatively inarticulate young woman refers to her lover as smiling over "some resuscitated engine"; another narrator, who uses adjectives like "foxy" and "goofy," also refers to a man who "belongs to the scurrilous tribe / that cheated my unhappy mother"; yet another refers to her lover's voice as "so supple and swag it slid out of his kat-mouth," but then goes on to proclaim, "Spinoza thought intuition was the highest form of cognition . . . " Scurrilous? Resuscitated? Cognition? Whatever the poems happen to be about, there is a certain imprecision or laziness of diction: breezes "mess" with one's sleeves, a nurse is "stupid" in her first job, drugs are "stuff," a street "was lull," late winter "keeps fucking you up."

In a jacket blurb, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa tells us we will follow Waring's poems "because we can trust the craft in *Dark Blonde* to transport us to a clear-sighted summit." To which I say, craft is in the eye of the beholder.

I'd like to turn finally to the best book by a British poet which crossed my desk during the months I was reading to write this review. It is

[6] DARK BLONDE, by *Belle Waring.* Sarabande Books. $12.95p.

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Charles Tomlinson's *Selected Poems.*[7] Compared to D. J. Enright, Geoffrey Hill, Peter Levi, Charles Causley, or James Fenton, Tomlinson (b. 1927) has always seemed a modern poet. One reason is his line breaks and his line lengths. Taking William Carlos Williams (and perhaps George Oppen) as his model for measure, Tomlinson's work has the clean look and sound of New World poetry:

> The variegated tremor
> of the reflected foliage
> brings autumn to the ponds:
>
> the rising fish
> create circles within circles,
> pools within pools . . .

We can imagine how differently some British contemporaries would have written those lines.

That particular poem does not utilize rhyme. But when Tomlinson does rhyme, it is with a lovely ear for subtleties, as in a late poem called "Harvest," in which he pairs field/filled, across/grass and changes/henges.

In addition to his literary debt to America, Tomlinson owes a geographical debt as well. While many of his British counterparts continue to write of turf stacks and jumble sales, marrows and Wessex guidebooks, Tomlinson's purview has included Manhattan, the Chrysler Building, Brooklyn Bridge, the Rio Grande, the Arizona desert, and more. As he points out in a brief Preface to this edition, even his vocabulary is divided between American and British sources. He cites one early poem in which he borrowed from both Pound and Hopkins—an unlikely duo. This volume closes with a 1997 poem containing lines which could serve as the poet's *ars poetica*: he speaks of the year preparing to make itself new, "As chrysalises, trees, and poets do." As Pound said, "Make it new."

To those who tend to read only modern and postmodern American poetry, or think most Brits traditionalists, this collection is a good place to begin to widen one's outlook. In 1993 Tomlinson received the Bennett Award for achievement in literature from *The Hudson Review.*

[7] SELECTED POEMS 1955–1997, by *Charles Tomlinson.* New Directions. $13.95p.

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CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

Struggling with Kristeva: A Long Voyage Home

> Thus we view the thetic phase—the positing of the *imago*, castration, and the positing of semiotic motility—as the place of the Other, as the precondition for signification, that is, the precondition for the positing of language.
>
> In our view, the analysis of texts shows that thetic lability is ultimately a problem with imaginary captation (disorders in the mirror stage that become marked scopophilia, the need for a mirror or an identifying addressee, etc.) and a resistance to the discovery of castration (thereby maintaining the phallic mother who usurps the place of the Other).
>
> [Defilement] absorbs within itself all the experiences of the nonobjectal that accompany the differentiation mother-speaking being [*sic*], hence all ab-jects (from those the phobic shuns to those that hem [*sic*] in split subjects).
>
> Head reclining, nape finally relaxed, skin, blood, nerves warmed up, luminous flow: stream of hair made of ebony, of nectar, smooth darkness through her fingers, gleaming honey under the wings of bees, sparkling strands burning bright . . . . Mane of beast—squirrel, horse, and the happiness of a faceless head, Narcissuslike touching without eyes, sight dissolving in muscles, hair, deep, smooth, peaceful colors. Mamma: anamnesis.

THE AIR IS THIN UP HERE. We struggle for oxygen, breathing so much abstraction. But there's an alternative. Swoop down, then: from intellection into feeling, word into flesh, mind into body, dry into wet. Male into female? The Father into the Mother, Julia Kristeva would say when she's underwater; "symbolic" into "semiotic," when she's up there in thin air. Either way we struggle—gasp for breath, or bubble and drown.

I'll shift to a homelier metaphor. You're at a party where you don't know the people. Sure, you spot a few acquaintances. Freud is there, that grand old man; Barthes and Foucault are across the room, talking to Levi-Strauss. That's Derrida over by the window. Someone points out Lacan. Still, there's nobody there you *know*, who "speaks your language," so to say. But how they do talk!

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But not to you. Yet you *were* invited; the jacket blurb presents *The Portable Kristeva*[1] as "a succinct and complete introduction for those new to her writings." Still, in the unlikely event that, as I have, you've spent four weeks of life inside this book, you realize that the reader envisaged as new to her writings isn't you. Nor (since we're being French) any other *lecteur moyen sensuel.*

Kristeva is an influential thinker. Her writings are referred to, discussed, assigned in courses. She's written twenty books. Columbia, where she teaches when she's not in Paris, has published fifteen of them; this is their second Kristeva anthology in ten years.[2] It's not for the general reader to pick and choose what's important in our intellectual ambiance, or too quickly to dismiss it. What's there is there. There's reason to take it on, if one is to exist, head up, in one's temporal and cultural moment. Still, one can express discouragement that a brilliant woman (no question of that), a dedicated editor, and a respected university press can have, individually and collectively, so little idea of readers' needs that they don't even know that the sign posted throughout this book so centrally concerned with language and signification reads "No Entry."

And yet Kristeva herself remembers how a novice feels. She records it in her transparently autobiographical novel. In it her stand-in, young Olga, newly arrived in Paris, encounters a strange and intoxicating new world. *The Samurai*[3] is a *roman à clef*, but its locks are easily opened. "Condestruction," Olga wonders. "What exactly did it mean?" She finds "Saida"'s new theory "profound" but "inaccessible." She hears him and "Lauzun" discuss psychoanalysis in symposium; "they were so obscure no one could understand a word they said." And the vocabulary! Olga's lover explains that individuals are "talking beings." But, Olga notes, he doesn't *say* "individuals." "He called them 'subjects.' " And from then on, so does she.

She catches on fast. "You have to begin by changing their way of speaking. Hence the revolutionary role of literature, and of the avant-garde in particular." The avant-garde—and now she is part of it. *The Samurai* is Kristeva's testimony to the excitement of her youth, when she arrived, not yet twenty-five, from the grey constraints of Communist Bulgaria, and was taken up by this white-hot, all-male group, "studying, discussing, delving into words and texts" in a "common ardor which made them into a strange species of their own." "Minds on the run" they were, performing on "a tightrope of intelligence over an abyss of unease and confusion." Samurai indeed; talking beings, their conversation a martial art. How could she not join them on the tightrope?

Reading about Olga and her new friends, light dawns for the reader "new to Kristeva's writings." "Talking beings"—*that's it*, that's what it

[1] THE PORTABLE KRISTEVA, ed. by *Kelly Oliver*. Columbia University Press. $18.00p.
[2] The first: *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi, 1986.
[3] Columbia University Press, 1992.

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means, that phrase "the speaking subject" that pervades *The Portable* from beginning to end, repeated, assumed, but never explained. It is, in fact, the key to her thirty-year concentration on language. But it is also a key to Kristeva's own development, to her mounting insistence on a language in which the speaking subject should express both thought and feeling. *The Samurai* is unrepresented in *The Portable Kristeva*, but it may well be a better introduction to her work.

In the *Portable*, however, we can follow her trajectory from the intoxicating hopes of the sixties to the chastened conviction that since politics has become "a new religion," "it would be more honest for me not to engage politically but to try to be helpful or useful in a narrow field, where the individual life is concerned." It is also a record of her passage from an emphasis on negation to a qualified affirmation of some distinctly old-fashioned values: in her own words, from "powers of horror" to "tales of love."

In the 1983 memoir which opens the *Portable*, Kristeva, recalling her faith in "the revolutionary role of literature" shrewdly analyzes that romantic and self-serving conviction. "What were we looking for in the PCF?" (Don't look to the editor to unpack this acronym; in this book you're on your own.) The question is clear enough. The answer, however ("a temporary Utopia") is clearer in the novel. In the memoir it comes out like this: "I identify as political perversion a coherent structure determined by an ideal . . . , which nevertheless uses the abjections of a reality, one that is neglected or even foreclosed, on behalf of libidinal or sublimated gratifications."

In fact this is not as meaningless as it sounds. There is often sense among Kristeva's sounds and signifiers. To show my four weeks' immersion has not been entirely in vain I risk a (tentative) paraphrase, viz.: the idealism that exploits for its own emotional and creative satisfaction society's outcasts and "abjections," while bypassing or ignoring their human actuality, is perverse politics. Kristeva shows a sharp retrospective insight into that heady subculture of which she was a part. "We"—what *were* we looking for in the French Communist Party? The title of the earliest, longest, and most punishingly theoretical of the writings collected here bears witness to her own share in that airy idealism. We were looking for revolution, and *Revolution in Poetic Language*, according to the editor "probably Julia Kristeva's best-known text," makes clear the oppressor: capitalism. Through its own "privileged" methods, "(capitalist) society" represses the body and the individual (yes, she calls it "subject"). She is not thinking of economics. The methods are linguistic; they are the "necrophilic methods on which the scientific imperative was founded—the building of arguments on the basis of empirical evidence, a systematizable given, and an observable object—in this case, language. . . . " Such a language is "an embarrassment when applied to modern or contemporary phenomena." What's needed is very different, a "signifying practice" "involving the sum of unconscious, subjective, and social relations in gestures of confrontation

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and appropriation, destruction and construction." "Productive violence, in short," to liberate us from "ideologies of communication and normativeness" and speed our "passage to the outer *boundaries* [italics hers] of subject and society." "Then—and only then—can it be jouissance and revolution." (Jouissance? It's another key term, courtesy of Roland Barthes, but don't expect this editor to define it, or tell you how its meaning of male sexual climax has been stretched to cover aesthetic and political ecstasy.)

To the barricades! "You have to begin by changing their way of speaking." For Kristeva, as for the other samurai, that productive violence was safely linguistic. It was what she welcomed in Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Joyce, and Artaud. By diving into the "semiotic," rooted in bodily drives and processes, one might recognize the pre-language, "preverbal," even "pre-Oedipal," that undergirds the achievement of abstract, "symbolic," discourse.

Semiotic and symbolic are equally necessary to talking beings. As she tells an interviewer (she can be pretty straightforward when talking to an interviewer), she has no patience with a sentimental feminism that rejects as male "whatever in language is of the order of strict designation, of understanding, of logic" in favor of a "feminine" language of "whatever has to do with the imprecise, with the whisper, with impulses," with "the tacit" and "the vague." Both "male" and "female" language constitute "the speaking subject"; the artist, especially, speaks from "the intersection of sign and rhythm, of representation and light, of the symbolic and the semiotic."

Accordingly, Kristeva situates herself at that intersection. She writes a novel. She writes "Stabat Mater," her valorization of motherhood, in two voices, the oceanic, maternal voice of the last of my four epigraphs, and the voice of "strict" (well, fairly strict) designation. Again it helps to access the young Olga. However excited by the world of the samurai, the "lucid world of logical rivalry and competition," Olga knew that too much of such discourse "can cancel out sensation," the "tapestries woven of scents and sounds, of burning skins, ravenous mouths, the flowering inside of the womb. She didn't talk much about love, she made it. If she was an intellectual, she was also a primitive."

Kristeva herself, however, would go on to talk a great deal about love. She would affirm "faith," "value," "idealization," "the positive." But she would reach these through a dark and twisting route. She did not write *Tales of Love* until she had written, three years before, *Powers of Horror.*

Already in *Revolution* she had associated "the mother's body" with "the path of destruction, aggressivity, and death." "Stabat Mater," written shortly after the birth of her son, evokes a *mater* who is *dolorosa* indeed. "One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain: the child represents it and henceforth it settles in, it is continuous . . . a mother is always branded by pain." And the father? *Powers of Horror* begins with his murder by the guilty sons of the primal horde. "Society is founded on a complicity in the common crime." The dark Freudian vision is the

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bedrock of Kristeva's universe, and the "ethics of psychoanalysis" she proposes must be, she tells us, "far removed from a call to brotherhood." The most "mankind" (a word this feminist is not afraid of) can look for is "solidarity founded on the consciousness of its unconscious—desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible." In Bulgaria, Kristeva had a Catholic education, and she knows what she is doing when she updates Original Sin.

Three years after she became a mother, Kristeva became a psychoanalyst. Not surprisingly, her practice confirms her vision of the powers of horror. The Freudian triangle—mother, father, child—affords her little reassurance. The unconditional, generous, uncontrolling "love of parents for their children" is the type of Christian agape—"when it happens which is not very often." But whether it happens or not, the infant's development is based on "a permanent negativity." The harsh but necessary "separation from the mother's body" is what "facilitates the articulation of the semiotic network," "the advent of sign and of syntax," the realm of the Father. The process is violent. It *cuts*. It separates "the subject" from the "all-encompassing," "omnipoten[t]" Mother, whose "replete body . . . takes the place of all narcissistic . . . gratifications." Replete, she is also "complete," since she "lacks the 'cut' that permits symbolism." "She is," we may be surprised to learn, "in other words, the phallus." Thus the Phallic Mother. Thus castration, "the ensemble of 'cuts' that are indispensable to the advent of the symbolic." Thus speech itself, "a *separation* from a fusion state of pleasure." (Italics hers.) Thus are we fallen, violently cut off from the maternal Eden.

But there's hope. "If society is truly founded on a communal murder" (and who could doubt that Freudian axiom?), "the realization that castration provides the basis for the sociosymbolic is what will enable human beings to postpone murder," even "to transform baleful chaos to an optimal sociosymbolic order." To achieve this realization, of course, society needs psychoanalysis. And so do we, Kristeva comes close to saying, all of us talking beings. For pain and aggression are everywhere in this world where parental adequacy is so rare. Helen dreams she is climbing Kristeva's stairs, "covered with bodies that looked like the people on my parents' wedding photo . . . I was supposed to eat those bodies, . . . those heads, my mother's head also." Florence dreams she "vomits after the sex act and her mother's head falls into the basin." Marie-Ange dreams she's planting a bomb in a car, but it's not a car, "it's her mother's bed," and "she suddenly notices that this mother . . . owned a penis." There's Olga again, for whom "only her nightmares seemed really significant." Are these powers of horror generated by Freudian experience? Or are they the strange fruit of Freudian belief?

For Kristeva is the truest of believers. Hers is the secure faith that cannot imagine what it might be like not to share her credo. If she is a postmodernist, she is a very atypical one. We do not often come across the word "truth" in the discourse of High Theory. In Kristeva's writings, however, though all that is solid may seem to melt into air, "truth" does

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not, nor does it appear in quotation marks. Nor do universals and universality, truth's common companions. Without embarrassment or irony, she writes of Levi-Strauss' linguistic theory as "attaining universal truth." To a politely resistant interviewer she makes clear that the possibility of generalization is a condition of thought. There are entities (love is one) that have "some essential points that last in every time, in every space. . . . And this allows for scientific investigation. There are some universals and that's why we can investigate them. Otherwise everything is different and nothing can be investigated scientifically or theoretically."

Kristeva deals in universal truth (what more universal than a theory of the genesis of language?). And for individuals, she emphasizes the need for the analyst "to uphold a *single* meaning, a *single* truth that is valid and demonstrable in a given situation." Psychoanalysis, in its attempt "to counterbalance truth and jouissance," knowledge and desire, is "the lay version, the only one, of the speaking being's quest for truth that religion symbolizes."

Psychoanalysis knows what it knows; there's no question about that. Kristeva is eerily adept at appearing to deny what she has just appeared to assert, but when the chips are down, the assertion wins out. The primal father-murder is "as much mythical as endowed with founding properties." Nevertheless, since "analytical attention now knows only too well" that it is "both the keystone to the desire henceforth known as Oedipal and a severance that sets up a signifier admitting of logical concatenation," she "will consider [it] to have been logically established." It *cannot* be falsified: "divergences from and even contradictions of this Freudian thesis are," after all, "finally no more than variants and confirmations."

One may long for a liberating application of those scientific methods of argument and evidence so cavalierly dismissed in *Revolution*. Yet if we keep at it, we find that Kristeva finds a way, for herself and her patients, a way beyond horror.

She certainly doesn't find it through evidence, but when has evidence been the guarantee of religious truth? Psychoanalysis is the "cure," both social and individual, that along with art, must take over from "religious discourse which is cracking now." It is psychoanalysis that can achieve an "equilibrium" between "death (the discourse of knowledge) and resurrection (the discourse of desire)." The vocabulary bespeaks the religious longing that underlies it. Religious, too, is the desire which recuperates through metaphor the precious concepts it can no longer accept literally. Metaphor is what carries Kristeva past the recognition that "the castration fantasy and its correlative penis envy . . . like the 'primal scene,' . . . are all *hypotheses, a priori* judgments." As metaphors for separation and "*lack* or *desire*," the penis, the "cut," however "mythical," become "logical necessities that are relegated to the 'origin' in order to explain that which never fails to function in neurotic discourse . . . even if these are never present in reality itself."

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Still, Kristeva's Freudianism is not Freud's. Hers is a psychoanalysis that "upsets the social contract . . . , founded, according to Freud, on an act of murder." Combining truth and jouissance, "analysts can be both "dead fathers of knowledge" and loving, maternal "subjects of affect [and] desire." Freud, she points out, neglected maternity, and had little good to say of love. For Kristeva, however, love, defined not only as "openness to the other" but as "undeath," "is the only thing which can save us."

It saves us through psychoanalysts: through transference and countertransference, which (unlike Freud) she is not afraid to call love. And with reason, since for her it is an experience of "paroxysmal intensity," "an *identification* with the analysand that mobilizes my entire psychic apparatus," "a sort of *transubstantiation*." And for all Kristeva's foregrounding of the "overwhelming," "too much desiring" mother, it saves us through mothers, mothers whose "desire to reproduce" gives society stability, mothers through whom "our speaking species, which knows it is mortal, might withstand death." "Women are finding that maternity is vital to the richness of female experience, with its many joys and sorrows. This trend is illustrated to its fullest extent in lesbian mothers or in certain single mothers who reject the paternal function." It's a trend she disapproves. Men and women need each other, and not just for reproduction. "If these practices were to become the norm, it would become absolutely necessary to develop appropriate laws that would diminish the violence that might be inflicted on the child and the father"—psychic violence, for someone outside the mother is necessary for the "cut" that makes possible, not only language, but "a loving life." If fathers act like mothers, she asks "who will play the role of separators?" "It is not so much what must be done in order that women be happy, it is: what is to be done in order that children have a [healthy] development."

Such ideas render Kristeva a controversial figure among feminists. Especially when she remarks (in another interview) that complaining about the oppression of women "doesn't interest me very much because if you look at things that way, the whole of culture oppresses women—a madrigal or Shakespeare is anti-woman." More, she "is not in favor of decimating men or of believing that patriarchy is a horror." Culture, she says, "in particular Occidental culture, which is founded on patriarchy and expressed in the great religions which were—which still are—Judaism and Christianity—has produced profoundly true visions of the human being . . . the being who lives in language and who is not reduced just to the womb and to reproduction." And if it's patriarchy that produces love and language, "long live patriarchy."

Thus, we arrive where we never expected when we set out on so tortuous a path. Here faith, love, even family values, cluster. Occidental culture too; "in short," as she reiterates in her memoir, "the old Judaeo-Christian Europe." In short, "the Western tradition"—words I actually heard Kristeva utter to an audience of surprised theoreticians at

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my own college, in 1988, when the culture wars were in full cry. We may welcome her arrival at this familiar destination—I do—and still ask—I do—was this trip necessary?

The Portable Kristeva is more than usually full of the typos that now regularly disfigure books from too many university presses. When "introducing" a difficult author who is moreover dependent upon the agility of translators faced with such words as "hecceite" and (can it be?) "hem," such editorial insouciance is not merely irritating but devastating. It has, however, its own appropriateness to a writer who at the outset of her career dismissed "ideologies of communication" as artifacts of capitalism. It is one more means, accidental but effective, of excluding the common reader.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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ANNIE FINCH's* book of poems, *Eve*, was published by Story Line Press. She is editor of *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women* (Story Line, 1994) and author of a book on prosodic theory, *The Ghost of Meter: Culture and Prosody in American Free Verse* (Michigan, 1993). . . . GINGER ANDREWS* is a native Oregonian, a professional house cleaner, and the janitor for the church next door. She is the recipient of the 1997 Mary Scheirman Poetry Award and is this year's runner-up for the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize. . . . JIM HENLEY is an at-home dad in Silver Spring, Maryland whose poems have appeared in numerous magazines. . . . JOAN MURRAY, author of *The Same Water* (Wesleyan), had a National Endowment for the Arts residency for 1997-98. . . . JOHN LOUGHERY's biography *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel*, a finalist for the 1996 Pulitzer Prize in Biography, has been published in paperback (Henry Holt/Owl Books). . . . KAREN WILKIN's book *Morandi* has just been published by Rizzoli. . . . A collection of essays in honor of WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD, *Under Criticism*, edited by David Sofield and Herbert S. Tucker, has been published by Ohio University Press. His own collection of essays, *Talking Back to Emily Dickinson*, is due out later this summer from the University of Massachusetts Press. . . . BRIAN COX is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Manchester, England. His *Collected Poems* was published by Carcanet in 1993. He is a member of the Arts Council of England. . . . ROBERT PHILLIPS is Professor of English at the University of Houston, and author of five books of poetry and two of fiction. . . . CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK's most recent publication is "Exiting Nirvana," in the Spring 1998 *American Scholar*.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

We have always been mistrustful of taking critical stances. We have published what we have liked, without feeling that we have to explain our choices in terms of some particular program or platform. If a piece of critical writing strikes us as saying something new and intelligent, and if it's clearly and forcefully expressed, we'll accept it without worrying about whether or not it conforms to this or that critical doctrine.

—Frederick Morgan, "The Hudson Review's Early Years," p. 297.

"All the world's a stage" has so long been a platitude that one is apt to forget how revolutionary it might have sounded when first uttered, and how the idea is likely to shock us still when expressed by a modern thinker like Clifford Geertz in his well-known statement, "There is no such thing as human nature independent of culture." In Shakespeare's time the tension felt by those who adventured out of the bounds of inherited status—new classes, new professions—was intense, and what one was, as an individual, became more problematic.

—Millicent Bell, "Hamlet, Revenge!", p. 310.

The modest, passive feminine ideal of the 1950s may, in many ways, be gone, but the voice that dictated it is not; it has simply made some changes in its demands. This voice, as it did in the 1950s, speaks from a male viewpoint. The world may change for women, and male taste and expectations may change with it, but that gaze is never diverted for a second. It is willful and tenacious. When *Sassy* encourages its readers to be their bold, clever, with-it, modern selves—when it, in short, encourages them to be "sassy"—it is usually in the context of how to land a date for the prom. This voice does not tell us to be ourselves; it tells us to be independent and savvy and smart because that's the way men like us—at least for now.

—Nicole Graev, "Tight Jeans," p. 351.

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